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THE SPACE GAMER

for creative adventures

in this issue

SHIPS & SWORDS
ARCH - REAPER
BLACK HOLE

THE SPACE GAMER

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, No. 24, 1979

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Where We're Going

An old saw has it that science fiction fans can predict and be ready to live in the future better than average folk. Like most old saws, this one is probably shakey. But, thinking about living in a future ten, twenty or fifty years away can lead to some interesting results. I wish I had the time to design a game that reflects trends several decades ahead. As a business, Metagaming will have to survive in a rapidly changing environment. A gaming simulation of the near future could be an invaluable aid.

The factors which should be included are many. The design constraints of the "Future" game should reasonably be limited to what an individual business in the U.S.A. can expect.

1. The individual can't affect larger events. Major economic, cultural and social trends are beyond our control.
2. All energy and raw material resources will be progressively more expensive and scarce.
3. Governmental size, expense and activity will continue to expand in all economic and social areas. The future will be more restrictive and controlled.
4. Social unrest from poverty and other causes will increase at least on the individual level. Organized social unrest will probably not increase.
5. Internationally, Russia will become the global "policeman". The U.S. will accept a gradual restriction of influence. Future international tension will be between competing communist governments.
6. The flood of illegal aliens and international refugees to the U.S. will increase sufficiently to swamp our social programs and "western" civilization.

The list could easily go on, but this is representative of major factors a "future" game should include. Some, or most, of you will disagree with these projections. You may be right. But, I expect to live in such a future. On average, we are going to be a poorer, more crowded, meaner, more controlled and unhappy populace as the years go by.

The point of the game would be for a business to survive and grow in such an environment. If we don't nationalize free enterprise out of existence there will still be, or at least can be, healthy growing firms in much worse environments than will come to pass. What will a business have to do to be a winner in tomorrow's drab future?

Starting with item number one, it's given that trends are beyond the individual. The strategy has to be avoiding the worst and looking for opportunity where others see disaster. The ideal business location will be near, but away from, major cities where the problems will be worst. You have to have large city services, but that doesn't mean living with their crowded problems. Leaving the city to it's problems may seem, uh--unpatriotic. The choice is to go down the tubes with the mob or survive. Remember, this is a game of prospering survival.

As for resource and energy shortages, they will progressively worsen, no ifs, ands, or buts. We will not develop a viable energy policy of self sufficiency. Look for less of everything and look to pay more for ever shoddier work. The strategy here is to build for minimal energy usage. Buy and plan equipment for minimal electric requirements. Expect to live with continual blackouts, brownouts, shortages and "temporary" reductions of service. Do build for solar space and water heating. Do plan for some solar power cells to maintain minimal functions. Thank your stars if you've got wind resources or a small undeveloped stream for some generating potential. Plan to build and buy simple things you can replace or repair locally. If you can grow it or dig it up for yourself, your chances go up.

Government? The age of bureaucracy and income "redistribution" is here to stay, and will get worse. Over 10% of G.N.P. goes through H.E.W. now, and it will get worse. The privileged class will become those with government paychecks. Their power will be sustained by their defendents, who draw government benefit checks of one sort or another. Over 30% of the economy is now in the form of direct government disbursements. The proportion of the population getting some of the money or living with someone who does, is now a majority. It will never be voted out of existence.

So, learn to live with government. The bigger bureaucracy gets, the more loopholes there will be. Don't be adverse to seeking favors or resorting to outright favors in the future. There is no right or wrong in a system that has so many laws and regulations that *all* the population conducts illegal activities unknowingly, or knowingly much of the time. There is getting caught and being stupid. You might be able to dodge a city government; but, the I.R.S. isn't to be fooled with; it's the closest thing we've got to believable religion.

Social unrest will increase, mostly in the form of individual, criminal and disruptive activities. Organized unrest probably won't increase. There will be a steady increase of aggression and violence between individuals. These will mostly be acts of frustration and helplessness. You can punch your neighbor or smash a bum on the freeway, but your mayor or senator is beyond you. The strategy here is again, avoidance. Unrest will be proportionally worse the higher the population density. Fewer people means less aggression. Selecting associates with care and looking harmless may help.

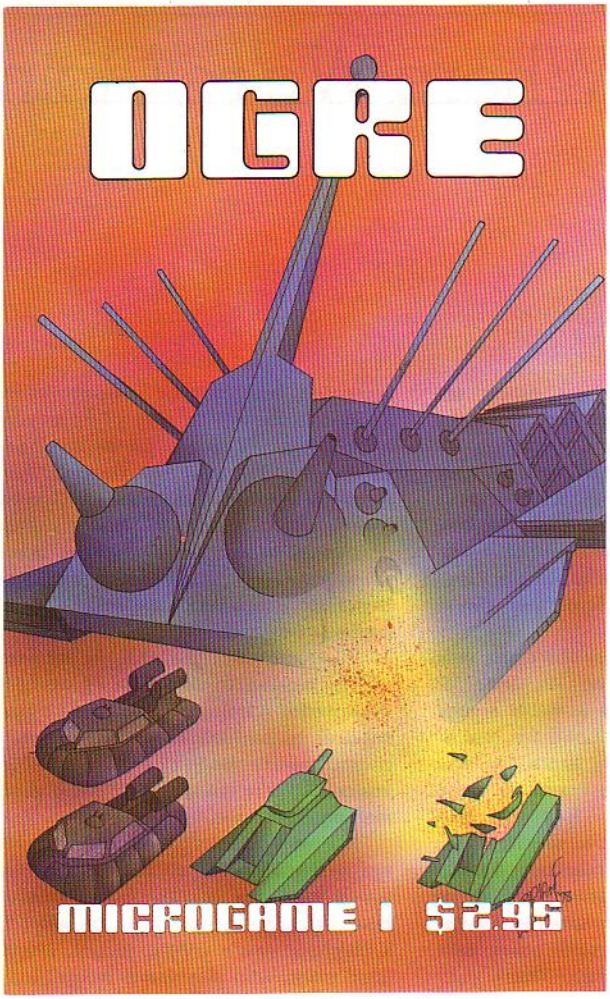
Internationally, the U.S. is impotent and merely looking to save face as we back out. That means a business needs to be more international in outlook than ever before. Your parent country needn't be the bully to do good business. We're going to *need* every good trade realtion we can get.

If I were president, I'd be stroking Mexican ego and macho for all it's worth. We ain't gonna have no Middle East oil very soon now. Why be too proud to be super nice to a neighbor who's willing to sell, albeit for a good price, who also wants recognition and a sincere thanks. If this means we all learn Spanish and live to see a Latinization of our culture, so what. Or rather, so what can we do about it anyway.

Which leads to number six, the demise or evolution of western culture in America. This will come for two reasons, the massive influx of illegal aliens, and our inability to sustain growth without cheap resources. A business can't fight the trend. The strategy is again to look for ways to survive. Learning Spanish as an employee policy and setting up production and marketing to the south couldn't hurt.

Well, that's it for the "future" game. Unless someone designs it for us, it's hypothetical. Metagaming does expect to survive in the future portrayed. We will all live in a much different world fifty years from now. The century of U.S. dominance is ending; Russia's is beginning. We will now be like all the others; a bit bigger, a bit stronger, but we'll still be an also ran. The point is how to survive, prosper and be happy in that future. Trying to change it is the way to frustration and misery. "If you can't lick'em -- join'em", may not go down easy, but it works.

. . . .Howard Thompson



SPEEDING DEATH. . . . .

In the year 2085, a tank duel lasts only seconds. An entire battle ends in minutes. Nuke-firing infantry men dodge across the battleground in powered suits, trying to come to grips with the enemy armor. And those armor units, both tanks and hovercraft, are deadly. Only a direct hit will take one out--a miss may stun the crew, but their machine will keep trying to kill you.

G.E.V., sequel to OGRE, adds more detail to Metagaming's fast-moving simulation of armored combat in the next century. G.E.V. is a new game, but its wholly compatible with OGRE. Stacking and terrain rules, new unit types, the Mark IV Ogre, and more. . . Scenarios include Raid, Breakthrough, Ceasefire Collapse, and The Train. And within hours, you'll be creating your own.

Experienced gamers will be most pleased with G.E.V.'s competitive play balance. The MicroGame format is excellent for raid scenarios. And, G.E.V. is a popular, tournament-tested success. If you want a fast playing, tactical challenge, don't miss G.E.V.

Components include:
*24 page illustrated rules booklet
*12" x 14" three color terrain map
*135 unit play counters

SUPERTANK. . . . .

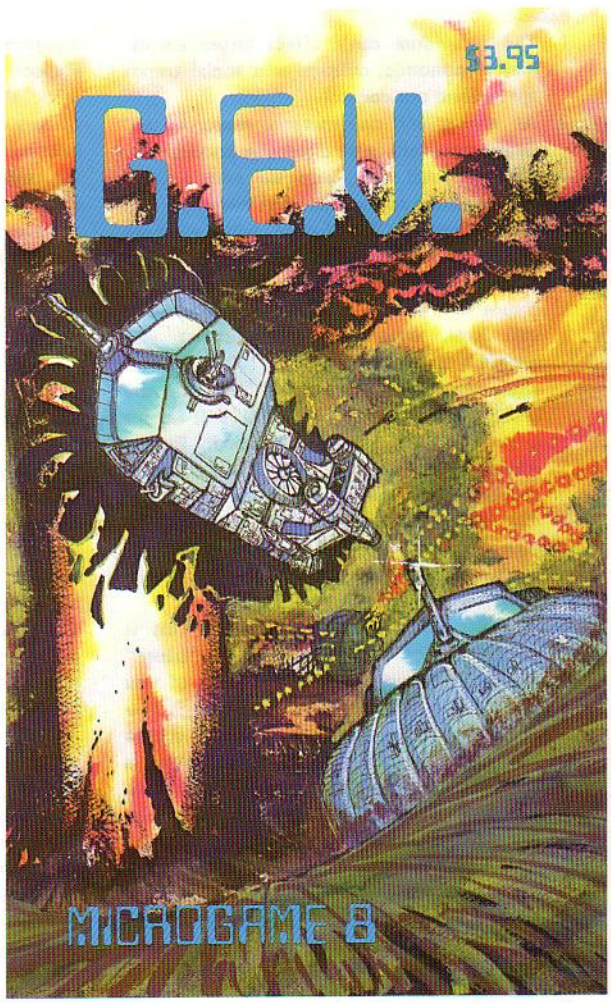
The command post is well guarded. Tanks, armed hovercraft, missile cannon, infantry in powered armor--all with one mission: to defend that vital spot. And your job is to go in and destroy it. Alone.

But when those defenders see you, they'.. wish they were somewhere else. Because you're not a man. You're a thinking machine--the deadliest device on any battlefield.

You're the OGRE.

OGRE has become a classic in two short years. It has pleased nearly 50,000 gamers and science fiction fans. OGRE proved that a $2.95 game could match any for sheer playing fun. If you haven't experienced this gem, you owe yourself. Or, just maybe, you're one of the many who has "worn-out" his first copy and needs another.

Components include:
*24 page illustrated rules booklet
*8" x 14" terrain map
*112 unit play counters



OGRE and G.E.V. are available at your local hobby, toy, and book stores–ask for them. OGRE is $2.95 and G.E.V. is $3.95 when ordered directly from Metagaming. Subscribers to THE SPACE GAMER pay $2.50 for OGRE and $3.50 for G.E.V. There is a 50-cent required postage fee for each mail order.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WARGAMING

by Mark Schulzinger

When I first started wargaming 20 years ago, I never gave the pastime much thought. I was happy enough to find a game more challenging than Monopoly and not as esoteric (to me, at least) as chess. The first question I can remember asking myself about the pastime was: "Why don't other people like to play these games?"

As time wore on I became a psychologist -- a member of a profession which constantly questions human behavior. I blithly continued wargaming (by that time it had become a hobby and not a pastime), but I still wondered why there only seemed to be a few gamers. When Howard Thompson asked me to write an article on psychology and wargaming, I finally got around to asking the question: "Why *do* some people like to play these games?"

The answers I came up with are interesting. They involve the nature of the gamer and the nature of the game. They spill over from psychology to philosophy and might even end up in metaphysics. While I will leave the metaphysics in the capable hands of David Isby, I feel I can take up the other two areas without much difficulty.

In this article I'm going to look at wargamers and their gaming. Since this is a magazine devoted to fantasy-sf gaming, I'm going to draw on my knowledge of science-fiction fandom for some answers and insights. I'm going to describe some gamers and fans in general terms. If you find yourself described herein, please don't take offense; if you find yourself excluded, don't feel left out. Human beings *en masse* are only hypothethical anyway.

THE GAMER

Let's start with a myth: The average wargamer is smarter, healthier, more charismatic, and possessed of a greater sex drive than the average homo sap. All those in favor of the above please raise a hand (just one hand, please). Good. Now, will all those who feel the same is true of the average sf fan please stand up?

I see a lot of people standing around and waving hands in the air.

Now that we've had our little fantasy, let's look at reality. Nearly everyone who participates in a hobby feels he fits into some special, superior group of mankind. Stamp collectors bore one another to tears with their discussions of the minutiae of their special collecting interests. Sports car enthusiasts discuss the merits of various cars far into the night. Cowboys Do It In The Dirt.

What all of this means is that each one of us feels the small bit of specialized information he possesses, raises him above the common herd and endows him with some special powers.

Now, occasionally someone within a special group will come up with special somethings-or-other. I recall reading a fanzine of the '40s which made reference to the fact a particular fan had a set of supernumerary nipples on his chest. The possession of four useless bits of tissue (on a male, at least) made him think he had risen to the level of *homo superioris*.

I have discussed this matter with my dog, and she told me she felt sorry for the poor, biologically underendowed creature.

Another fan I knew felt he was superior because (1) he belonged to MENSA, and (2) he got seven pages in a medical journal at birth because of a prenatal heart defect. He was a helluva nice guy, but used to pass out business cards imprinted with his name and the legend: "Genius/reasonable rates/I furnish my own pencil".

Even the ability to discourse knowledgeably about space travel, time travel, nuclear reactors and magnetohydrodynamics makes the average sf fan feel superior. He has acquired some information which the rest of humanity does not possess (he thinks), and he can talk glibly about it to the utter dispair and disgust of everyone else. He shares a set of secrets with his fellow fans -- including a language.

After a while, however, he finds out his sub-set of acquaintances within fandom is growing, and he has to create a separate sub-sub-set within which he can feel superior to other fans. Nancy Rainey summed this process up very nicely in her song:

"I'm a different kind of slan.
"I've got tendrils on my can---
"Some are brown and some are tan.
"I'm a science-fiction fan!"

In this respect, wargamers are like sf fans. They share a secret literature, TSG, S&T, The General, et al. They talk knowldegeably about hexes and CRT's, MF's (watch where you talk about that!), stacking limits and whatnot. If they happen to be D&Ders or EPTers, their language gets even more esoteric.

And how they talk about it! Even when people don't want to hear, they talk about it. They bore their dates to death, and drive their wives into another room. They even *do* unintelligible things. They show you a colored scrap of cardboard, and solemnly assert it represents the Waffen SS Division. Then they procede to move it around on a funny-looking mapboard according to imcomprehensible rules and insist the Map is the Territory.

And, because of this, they think they're some kind of special human being.

Now, in defense of both gamer and fan, most of both kinds of these people I've met have been fairly bright and well-informed. This is because the nature of the hobbies contains more genuine information about the real world than some other pasttimes. Science fiction is based pretty soundly on the scientific and technical culture-base, and fans have read a whale of a lot of scientific articles just keeping up with the fiction.

The wargamer may start out just playing the games, but before long he manages to get roped into reading the history behind the games. In the past, S&T filled this need/desire pretty well, but I have found that a lot of gamers really get out and hit the libraries and bookstores for additional material. One lucky guy is a professor of history who talked his department chairman into setting him up with a "History Laboratory." On entering and confronting the five gaming areas and massive collection of games, you would wonder if you had died and gone to that big Origins in the Sky. It is like walking into the Ultimate Slanshack.

As for gaming sub-groups, there are those who will play nothing more than role playing games, or huge games like War in the East, or figure games. Each sub-set of gamers has its own esoterica which allows it to feel superior in some way to other gamers.

THE GAMES AND THE SENSORIUM

But what is it about the games that makes gamers want to keep on gaming? Why do we

continue to spend our meager wealth on more and more of these cardboard creations? The answer to this question lies both in the games and our neurology.

The games do, of course, create interest in the player. I can still remember the thrill of moving the pieces around on my first game -- Gettysburg. It was simple, simplistic, but more fun than Scrabble (still is, for that matter). The very gameboard was more exciting than anything I had ever seen before.

Maybe the first thing a gamer does when he wants to examine a game is to look at the mapboard. The prettier it is, the more intrigued he becomes. In a way, we remain slaves to packaging. If the mapboard looks dull, we tend not to buy the game. If it looks interesting, we buy. AH managed to keep running for a long time with that concept: create a new visual stimulus for the gamer, but keep other game features relatively standard. It's analogous to putting a slightly changed paper towel into a brand new wrapper.

Fortunately for us all, we have within us something you might want to call "monkey curiosity". Our nervous systems seem to demand constant stimulation, and if we don't get it, we don't develop normally. Experiments performed with kittens in visually stimulating fields describe this phenomenon in greater detail. If you construct a series of small rooms and decorate the walls with various geometric patterns, and then let a young kitten wander around in them freely, the kitten develops into a curious, alert cat. If, on the other hand, you put the kitten into a little cart and pull it through the rooms, the resultant cat is relatively incurious and lethargic.

This is why we put little dangles in a baby's crib: the infant learns to actively explore and manipulate the environment and, hopefully, develops into a more complete human being. On the other hand, the infant deprived of such activity becomes passive, incurious, and often seems intellectually dull.

Human beings have another ability, however; if sufficient stimulation is not forthcoming from the environment, the child will often stimulate himself. This is why we often see autistic children repeating certain behaviors. They're performing sensory self-stimulation because they seem to have difficulty receiving stimulation from the environment.

Erik Erickson has translated this concept into mental terms. He stipulates that the organism actively seeks greater levels of "stimulus complexity", and will attempt to provide them for itself if they are not forthcoming from the environment. This explains why painters paint and writers write.

It also helps to explain why gamers game. Let's take, as an example, OGRE. Here is a game of relatively low stimulus complexity (but high enough to make it a great game). It took the gaming world by storm and was played until the players wore the sides off their dice. At that time, the players wanted more: more counters, more maps, more rules. More stimulus complexity. GEV is the result. It provided a higher level of stimulus complexity for the gamer.

Some gamers have reached a level of demand for stimulus complexity where those games they used to consider difficult are now considered almost too simple to play. I know gamers who consider WAR IN THE EAST a beer and pretzels game. I know others who consider WARP WAR too complex to play. THE NEXT WAR has reached a level of complexity where each separate battle must be resolved only after considering about a dozen possible factors which might modify the die roll on the CRT.

In such a way, then, wargamers are slaves to both the genetic heritage of demand for environmental exploration and to the emotional demands of more and more complex intellectual stimulation. But, if we were not so enslaved we would all still be playing TACTICS II and Monopoly.

WARGAMING AND SEX

Conceptually I am a Freudian. This makes it mandatory that I eventually talk about the sexual side of wargaming. Since we are all biologically sexual creatures, it is obvious (to me, at least) that the ebb and flow of sexual tensions make themselves manifest in all areas of human endeavor.

This was brought home to me forcefully at Chicon II. L. Sprague De Camp got up on the podium and solemnly talked about the symbolism of science-fiction: the slender, pointed spaceship forcefully penetrating the yielding void to spew forth the seed of mankind. Wow! Heady stuff for an adolescent.

It was true, of course. Science-fiction was originally written for adolescents and, although we didn't realize it, we were busily sublimating our barely-fledged sexual urges between the pages of Astounding, Startling, and Thrilling Wonder Stories (Playboy hadn't been invented yet). The sexual symbols embedded within sf stories were specific enough to be highly satisfying, but hardly specific enough to be prurient.

This is why sex never entered science-fiction (at least not until Phil Farmer wrote "The Lovers"). We were all kids and could accept John Carter marrying Deja Thoris, but we couldn't even consider what *must* have happened afterwards. Randy Garrett did, though, and came up with this: "So now my story's over/and I your pardon beg./John Carter laid the Princess/and the Princess laid an egg."

Since many of the wargamers today are adolescents, we can apply the same symbolisms. What's *really* going on when you're playing BARBAROSSA as the Germans and your armored columns penetrate deeply into Mother Russia? Hmm – too much for you? Okay, play Starship Troopers and let the Roger Young spew its load of encapsulated troopers into the drop zone.

Remember, warfare is a sexual activity. Freud may have talked about the death instinct, but later Freudians realize that sex and war are too closely related to require any additional theories. It's a documented fact that men in battle will get erections and even ejaculate under such conditions. It's also a fact that sexual intercourse resembles a physical battle complete with struggling, screaming, and even pain.

I'm certainly not going so far as to state that warfare and wargaming represent homosexual sex. That's patently absurd. But, if you look closely at a wargame you can see all the sexual aspects of it. The game begins with a gradual swelling of forces on both sides and the first tentative thrusts into the enemy position. Then comes the battle furious, climaxing with the destruction of one side. The game then subsides into a leisurely winding down as the victor mops up the board. Pillow talk then ensues as the participants post-mortem the game.[1]

This is generally why you don't see many women playing wargames. The games are so masculine in their approach that most women have a difficult time appreciating them psychologically. While sexual drives in women are the same as in men, there are physiological differences between the two sexes which result in different approaches. Women are usually slower to arouse sexually than are men, and their cultural conditioning generally leads them to be less sexually aggressive than men. If you do happen to find a wargaming gal -- watch out -- she will be more ruthless than *you* could ever be.

I would also suspect there's an interesting age grouping among wargamers which parallels the age grouping among sf fans. There should be a large number of gamers in the 12-17 year range. This is the age range within which sexual strivings are relatively unformed, and within which peer groupings of the same sex are usually more interesting than girls. From 18 to 28 there are probably not too many gamers. They've finally discovered girls, are running around, getting married, and starting families. The age range of 30-40 would be the smallest. Most of the sexual energy during this period of life goes into maintaining the family and making a living. At 40 the number of gamers should start to increase again as children leave the house, and there starts to be more time for extracurricular activities.

WARGAMING AND PERSONALITY

Theory aside, wargaming is an interesting way of looking at personality structure. Role playing games will, in particular, tell you a whale of a lot about ehe people you're playing with. Sometimes you may even find the lie behind the myth we looked at earlier in this article.

Sometimes a quiet, unassuming guy will surprise you with the way he plays a game. He'll come on like gangbusters while you're still trying to feel him out. Another gamer will get so involved with the game, he'll begin to emulate the real leaders. I knew a fellow who, when he was the German player in WORLD WAR II, would actually become paranoid, accuse the other players of plotting against him, and go into remarkably Hitlerian rages.

Because the basic structure of the wargame

[1]When I discussed this idea with some fellow gamers they asked me to make note of the feelings some gamers get when they first punch out the counters of a virgin game. It's a cute idea but it appears to me that the quest for virginity is culturally determined and not, therefore, a basic part of the psychic structure. I thought you'd like it, anyhow, so I put it in this footnote. Thanks, guys.

is fantasy, the gamer tends to project his own personality into the gaming situation. This is the basic idea behind many psychological tests: present the subject with a situation and see what he projects into it. The greater the amount of projection, the more that can be determined about the subject's personality. In addition, the less structured the situation is, the more that can be determined about the personality.

This is why fantasies and projections of personality are strongest in the role-playing games. These games are relatively unstructured and allow for the maximum of projection by individual players. It is in these games we find most gamers want to be extremely powerful, intensly virile fighting men. Many gamers want to be thieves. I have never met a role-player who wanted to go into a game as a person of the opposite sex to be anything less than superb in all the major character attributes.

Even in a dungeon, I have rarely seen a player do something out of his real-life character. Sexually repressed people will not dream of entering into fantasy sexual liaisons, and aggressive people will not bother to think through a problem. I do remember an instance where a mute elf on roller skates elected to have a homosexual affair with his doppelganger, and gave a dungeon party which saved their behinds in a tough situation. It is reasonable to assume, however, anyone who would assume the persona of a mute elf on roller skates would do something weird and wonderful!

One of my friends hit on the idea of creating a gag dungeon in which each player had to go into it as himself. He assigned all abilities and levels. I recall that I went in as an 11th level Psychologist with a collapsible couch. My spells included: Create Neurosis, Create Homosexual Panic, Persuasiveness, and High Fees. Talk about indulging in fantasy!

Fantasy can become very seductive, however, and I have noticed that there seems to be a decided trend toward the role-playing games. It's as if some gamers were abandoning reality (and I consider sf gaming to be a form of reality because it represents a structured, self-consistent gaming situation as opposed to an unstructured role-playing game) for some never-never land in which all wishes come true. I can't go into this idea in more detail now. It's still vaguely formed but, I feel, worthy of further consideration.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND SPECULATIONS

The time has come to try and wrap all the things I've written about into a neat package. Maybe it won't be so neat, because I'm getting data from anecdotal and intuitive sources, and not from experimental ones. Still, psychology is far from being a science and if the package resembles a topologist's nightmare, it's because my field doesn't have all the answers at the present time.

We've seen how the gamer likes to think of himself as being a superior critter. This is partially because of his accumulation of esoteric knowledge and partially because he makes forays into areas of knowledge which are either unknown to or uninteresting to most other people. In a way, this feeling of superiority and exclusivity increases his tendency to game.

We've also looked at the sexuality implicit in gaming. To the extent that sexual drives build up to the point of requiring release, become released, and start to build up again, the gamer will continue to game. Once he discovers sex, he is likely to stop gaming, only to return after his brains begin to migrate from his gonads to his head. This is one of the interesting things about humanity. We're not bound to a mating cycle, and our sexual aggressiveness is fairly constant throughout the year. Since sex is mainly in the mind, we can sublimate it in any number of ways -- including wargaming.

Man likes to stimulate himself. Given a lack of environmental stimulation he'll paint scenes on cave walls and invent games like Mancalla and Go. In a society which provides a high level of environmental stimulation anyway, people will seek ever more sophisticated ways of self-stimulation. One of these ways is through wargaming.

The personality of the gamer is reflected in the game he plays. His choice of game, his style of play, his attitude toward winning or losing -- these are all clues to his personality. There is no one wargamer's personality; we are individuals.

It occurs to me that, if mankind has any one real ability, it's the ability to wage war. We've been doing it for a gigayear -- first against the environment and then against one another. We talk an excellent peace, but we wage a hell of a good war. I don't think it is an accident that wargaming reached its maximum growth stage during a peroid of violent anti-war protest. Remember, the protest was a form of warfare in its own right.

We like to fight. We like to fight on the battlefield and on the board. We like to fight with our minds and our bodies. We like to fight so much that we sometimes don't even mind getting killed. That's one of the reasons why women rarely play wargames. War doesn't make sense to them. It's a masculine preoccupation. But, you'll have to read what Bob Heinlein has to say on the subject. He makes a more cogent case than I ever could.

Comes the day we get off this mudball and into the universe, we may meet someone Out There. I have a feeling that if we do, we're going to wind up fighting their battles for them. It may even be the only salable skill we take with us. This is assuming, of course, such an aggressive civilization can manage to live long enough to get into space.

And what will we wargamers be doing when the day comes, and human spacefleets are fighting the Battle of the Sixth Decant for Enro the Red? Yep, you guessed it. We'll be pushing little squares of cardboard around according to incomprehensible rules, busily sublimating our sexuality and telling ourselves how special and wonderful we are.

BLACK HOLE

a designer's introduction

by

Robert Taylor

Preface

The economics of asteroid mining were a classic example of supply and demand. Terra's demand for raw materials was well established, and several corporations had made the huge investments to exploit the asteroid belt to satisfy that demand.

The actual riches of the Belt had fallen vary short of the figures speculated on in the 20th century, making each asteroid with even modest deposits a prize worth fighting for.

As with oil, cartels developed around the Belt's resources. The cartels had all the trappings of nations and didn't shirk minor conflicts. The discovery of an exceptionally rich asteroid would often result in a scramble to reach the asteroid with enough military leverage to enforce a claim. You make your own law and order 2 AUs from the Earth.

Ships transporting the men and arms to an asteroid would usually avoid combat with each other since their value could exceed even the worth of a mineral rich asteroid.

Although the corporations prospered, they avoided areas of limited and uncertain returns. Most of the prospecting was done by independent miners. Miners was a misnomer. These prospectors made their fortunes by selling information. With the equipment on their sensory packed ships, they would record the necessary data about a particular asteroid then place the data on the auction block. Of course, they would leave out the location of the asteroid until the deal was settled.

Like the solitary gold prospector of the 1800's, the asteroid prospectors were independent, self-sufficient, and greedy.

Winchell Dunkin was a typical prospector except he was the first human being to discover a black hole. He was also the first person to be killed by one.

Dunkin was only attracted to the asteroid due to its strange shape since his instruments indicated there were no mineral deposits of interest.

As he approached the asteroid he speculated on what natural forces could shape an asteroid like a torus. As his ship passed over the "hole", he realized that the molding forces had been artificial, alien.

On the interior side were three areas, spaced 120 degrees apart, that contained a wild array of structures and buildings. Excitedly entering his shuttle craft and separating from the ship, Dunkin began maneuvering to land near one of the areas. Dunkin never imagined the force that destroyed him. One moment he existed, the next he was a burst of x-ray energy.

When Dunkin's ship began broadcasting a mayday, it included the telemetry readings of its sensory equipment as well as all of its visual information about the asteroid.

The data brought a quick response from the two major cartels. Armed strike forces were launched to capture the asteroid-artifact.

And the battle for BLACK HOLE was on.

(from the game)

The Premise:

My method for designing science fiction games is similar to the approach a writer takes toward a science fiction story. Like the writer, I rely on the "what if. .?" premise to create an interesting starting point. Hopefully, this root idea will be fertile enough to develop a game.

Development of the premise works in many directions. It is a theme to be proved by the trial and error of playtesting, it provides a goal for the gamer's design to work toward, and it must form the basic concept of a structurally sound game.

As the basic concept of the game, the premise is a critically important element of SF games. While historical wargames have an actual conflict or situation to act as their premise, an SF game's premise must simply spring into being with little in the way of background information (books, articles) to aid in its development. Thus, the strength of the premise alone must provide the necessary factors which will produce a successful game design.

And while these factors are realized in the game by means that are usually similar (if not the same) to the mechanics in any other wargame (for all their distinctiveness in the gaming hobby, SF games share *many* factors common to all wargames), the premise element is one of those factors unique to SF games.

For BLACK HOLE, the premise is: tactical combat with conventional weapons in the near future on a small planetary body with a low gravity field and no atmosphere. The situation created by this premise would allow the projectiles (bullets, missiles, etc.) fired by the opposing forces to orbit the planetary body, and thus become added factors to the game when their orbits returned them to the battlefield. Since projectiles, like bullets, don't differentiate between friend and foe, a player's units could be attacked by projectiles they had fired.

The idea of a battlefield alive with orbiting projectiles was very appealing to me. I felt it would give the game a unique feature.

This "unique feature", while promising, was still only an abstract premise at this point in BLACK HOLE's evolution. Then, the task of development (playtesting, trial and error, grind-it-out work) could begin to transform this premise into a workable game system.

The major components of a game are its map and counters. They are directly interlocked by two important factors, game turn length and scale. These elements are developed simultaneously; each one aiding in the others' progress like a team of mountain climbers. However, a discussion of the simultaneous development of these aspects of the game would be quite demanding on my part and

would probably make for rather dull reading on the gamer's part. Therefore, for the sake of clarity and interest, I will discuss each aspect separately.

Scale:

As I stated in the premise, I wanted a tactical game. To me, tactical means each map hex represents one kilometer or less of terrain, and each combat unit represents ten or fewer soldiers, vehicles, etc. For BLACK HOLE, I arbitrarily chose a scale of one hex equals one vehicle. This was my starting point. I felt I could easily reduce the map scale to one hex represents 250 meters and increases the counter representation, if necessary. Basically stated, my choice of scale allowed me enough scope to meet the requirements of the other components as they developed.

I never discovered how flexible my scale could be, since my first choice for both hex size and unit representation proved to be workable throughout the game's evolution.

Time:

I approached the factor of time in the same manner as scale. I determined the length of time per game turn based on what was appropriate for a tactical situation. While tactical games like Panzer Leader, Arab-Israeli Wars, and PanzerBlitz have a game turn representing five minutes, other games, like Air War have a few seconds represent their game turns. I chose a one minute game turn for BLACK HOLE since it is an easy figure to work with and had enough range (on either side) to allow adaption for any changes in other factors.

Unlike the game scale, BLACK HOLE's time factor was tinkered with a great deal during development. Of course, a change in the time factor to accommodate another component would eventually effect the other elements and soon, *every* aspect of the game would be out of balance. This happened quite frequently, and each time, I had to literally tear the game apart and rebuild it. The time factor was the elusive part, the square peg for the round hole that just wouldn't fit no matter how hard I tried to force it. Curiously, after experimenting with a dozen different time lengths, I returned to my original length of one minute and was able to make it work to all. The trial and error work done gave me the essential knowledge I needed to balance the game components.

Counters:

With the game scale and time per turn determined, I was able to fix the movement rate for the counters. For example, a unit with a movement factor of one hex per turn would be traveling at a speed of 60 kilometers per hour or 38 mph. Combining this information with the game's premise made it easier to develop a framework for the unit counters. Although the next part of this article concerns the development of the game's counters, it will also touch on aspects of the map's evolution. The map will be fully discussed in its own section.

In its initial form, I chose the moon for BLACK HOLE's battlefield. (Of course, at this point the game didn't have a name, and in fact, picking a title was about the last thing done.) My first prototypes of unit counters were developed with the lunar battlefield in mind, and were armed to reflect the game's premise concerning conventional weapons. There were three groups: the first was the infantry (aided by rocket backpacks for added mobility) armed with rifles, machine guns, etc.; hovercrafts, armed with missiles which carried grapeshot warheads, made up the second group; and the third consisted of lunar rover style vehicles armed with artillery and mortar weapons.

Using the infantry as my base unit, I gave it a combat strength of one, and one movement point. In proportion to the infantry, the hovercraft have a combat strength of three and three movement points, while the rover units' combat strength was six and a movement rate of one.

I made the number of infantry units twice as large as the hovercraft, which were double the number of the rover units. Of course, to maintain the game's premise I made counters to represent the bullets, missiles, and rounds fired by the combat units. Each projectile counter contained the combat strength of the unit that fired it.

It was now necessary to determine the movement rate of the various projectile counters. And it was here the problems began. Let me explain something.

My map was a standard MicroGame map (15 x 22 hexes). It represents approximately 330 square kilometers of lunar mare. The terrain features included a flat plain with a number of craters and a few low hills. To resolve the question of projectiles encountering mountains after they left the map, I had planned to use a die roll to determine which projectiles would survive to return to the map. So far so good.

The average muzzle velocity of an average rifle is about 500 meters per second. At this rate of speed, a bullet fired by an infantry unit would travel off the map in the first turn it was fired, and while the speeds of the missiles and artillery rounds are less than that of a bullet, they would be off the map by their second turn. The situation created by these movement rates is hardly one where "the battlefield would be alive with orbiting projectiles". While the speed of the projectiles was too fast for the map, their speed was too slow for the moon. Traveling at 500 meters per second, it would take a bullet over six hours to return to the battlefield.

While thse difficulties were enough to ruin the game's concept, other problems quickly appeared to challenge the game's validity. Among these was how to show at what altitude the projectiles were orbiting, e.g., if an infantry unit on a low hill fired at an enemy unit also on a low hill, units could pass beneath their line of fire without fear of attack since the rounds would be passing overhead in relation to them. Of course, the simple solution is to have a number on the counter to indicate its altitude, and then, have plenty of projectile counters for various altitudes.

However, a MicroGame is limited to 135 total counters, and there are never enough for such luxuries.

Once again, after a great deal of fruitless, but educational trial and error, (this is when I experimented with different time lengths per game turn) I found the solution for these problems was quite simple: admit the problems are insoluble, and approach them in a different manner.

My method was similar to that used by Alexander on the Gordian Knot. I cut out the infantry units and armed the remaining units solely with missiles carrying grapeshot warheads. The missiles, once launched, would achieve orbital velocity and altitude and would detonate if they passed over a hex containing a combat unit; otherwise, they would just continue to orbit.

This solved my altitude problems, simplified the mechanics of combat, and was more realistic and scientifically plausible than other weapons. A warhead, two meters in length and a meter wide containing over a million sharp pellets, would saturate a square kilometer of terrain as opposed to the damage a few bullets or artillery rounds would do. Eventually, after more playtesting, I brought the number of unit types back up to three, altered from the originals. One group was made up of vehicles like the legendary "space scooters", a skeleton framework with a rocket engine at the rear. I visualized the vehicle as ten meters long with a crew of three. This became the Personnel Service Vehicle (PSV) units in the game. Each PSV could only launch one missile per turn, but had a movement rate of 4 and combat strength of 2.

The next group's vehicle was similar to a flying, flatbed truck. While only slightly longer than the PSV, the Mobile Platform Vehicle (MPV) was much wider, and with its crew of six could launch two missiles per turn. I gave this unit a movement rate of 3 and combat strength of 4.

The final unit type was the eight man crew, Heavy Equipment Vehicle (HEV). Unlike the other two types, this was a ground unit. With a slower movement rate of 2, this huge vehicle could fire three missiles per turn with a combat strength of 6.

Despite their various combat strength, I gave each unit type a defensive strength of 1, because these vehicles had no armor, the crew rode on the outside (there is no inside), and they were basically transport vehicles placed in a battlefield situation. The identical defensive strengths fit well into my rationale for the game. The cartels of the asteroid belt could not afford to maintain standing armies, and any men and materials used for combat purposes would have to come from their regular personnel and equipment.

The missile counters were easy to bring into focus, once the combat unit counters were established. The unit representing one missile has a combat strength of 2, while the two missile unit has a strength of 4, and a three missile unit has a 6 strength. I gave each missile unit a defensive strength of 2, due to their small size and high speed. However, just for fun, I allowed warhead detonation to possibly detonate *other* warheads, and creating a chain reaction of exploding missiles.

Determining the movement rates of the missile counters was an enormous task. For a period of three months, I attempted to find

the correct number of movement points for the missiles. Their movement would have to fit the game's framework and balance the other components and factors. My trial and error method was again unsuccessful, but as always, quite informative. My playtesting had arrived at 8, as the best compromise for the missiles' movement rate. A higher number resulted in combat units firing directly on enemy units, while a lower figure required an unacceptable number of counters, since a combat unit could fire several times before a missile would reach its target. While 8 movement points would work, it didn't measure up to my premise, and it made play too ponderous.

Finding little satisfaction with my compromise movement rate, I sought another solution. Researching various missile systems provided my answer. I discovered certain types of wire guided missiles move slower when controlled, but after breaking free of their guide wires (when it is assumed they are aimed correctly), they increase their speed. Although my missiles are not wire guided, but radio controlled, the principle matched my needs very well. Applying this knowledge to my missiles, I gave them a launch phase movement rate of 6 and thereafter, a movement rate of 20. This made direct attacks by combat units infrequent, and I finally had my "battlefield alive with orbiting projectiles".

The laser combat units were a direct result of BLACK HOLE's unique map. I had never planned to include any exotic weapons, since they conflicted with my premise. Also, laser and beam weapons require a direct line of sight, and small planetary bodies have very short horizons making such weapons rather useless. But, when BLACK HOLE's map achieved a torus shape, I saw the advantage of developing laser weapons. There are three types of laser units, and they mirror their missile counterparts in every respect of combat strength, defensive strength, and movement. However, the laser units have certain advantages and disadvantages. On the outside of the torus, where the horizon bends away from the observer, the laser units are almost worthless, while on the inside of the torus, where the horizon bends toward the observer, they have a clear line of sight. Although their combat strength is reduced or increased depending on the distance to their target, laser units occupying inside hexes are a deadly force (but, the missiles are more fun).

The Map:

As mentioned in the section concerning the counters' development, I first placed BLACK HOLE on Earth's moon, but discovered that the moon was too large a body, taking over six hours for a missile to return to the battlefield. I wasn't too dismayed by this since the solar system has an ample supply of moons. But, about a dozen moons later, I was still trying to find a moon small enough to fit the movement rate of the missiles and combat units.

In a rare flash of intelligence, it dawned on me to make the map represent the entire planetary body rather than a section of one. My moon became an asteroid, and I began to examine the orbital velocities on such a body. Suddenly, everything started to smooth out: the orbital velocity was within an acceptable fudge factor, I didn't need any extra die rolls to determine what happened to the missiles once they left the map, my playtesting indicated this new map would reduce the number of marker counters needed, and the story line for the game could draw off an old SF motif-mining rights in the asteroid belt.

However, as I began to explore how the missiles moved on a rectangular body, I found certain inconsistencies. I folded the map together and created a model of my asteroid in order to trace the true path of an orbiting missile. I discovered that how the map was folded would determine the orbital trajectory of the missile.

My problem was that for a rectangular sheet of paper, divided into hexagons, to represent the surface of an entire body, each hexagon would have to be adjacent to six other hexagons. Since a rectangluar map didn't work, I experimented with other shapes: square, no; hexagon, no; circle, no; triangle, no; and on, and on, and on. . . . .

I became an expert on paper folding. All my elementary school skills of scissors and paste came back to me as I cut and glued my various geometric maps together. Perhaps there is a way to get those hexagons adjacent, but I never discovered it. However, during one paper folding marathon (purely through accident), I created a torus, and was inspired. the game's development seemed to accelerate after I altered the map to a torus. The only major change made to the map once I firmly decided on the donut shape was lengthening the map from 22 to 30 hexes. This allowed me to increase the missiles' movement rate to 20 and thus, add more zip to the game.

The torus brought about the jump rule which allowed the PSV units to jump across the inside of the torus. And this produced the idea of placing something at the center of the torus's hole to make the jump a little more interesting and dangerous. Thus, the torus got a black hole, the game got a title, and I was finally able to start a story line for the game's setting. Of course, this story line became the preface about Winchell Dunkin.

The craters on the map act as the equivalent of foxholes and allow the combat units some protection from intense missile fire. The mountains serve a definite game purpose since missiles detonate when they enter a mountain hex. This keeps the map from becoming to cluttered with missiles, and also reduced the need for a large number of missile counters. However, there is an optional rule which treats the mountain hexes as plain hexes. It is probably necessary to have an extra set of counters available to use this rule.

Of all of BLACK HOLE's aspects, I am proudest of the map. It uniquely matches my premise.

The Science:

The science in BLACK HOLE is of a 'rubber' nature. The physics of the missile units' movement is certainly very questionable. However, if the disregard for Newtonian physics in *Star Wars* did not upset you, you won't find BLACK HOLE's neglect of a few laws of physics too disturbing.

Please believe, me, I did extensive research on the gravitational mechanics of the missiles and the black hole. I applied that research as accurately as possible to the game. However, an exact simulation of how the missiles should move is rather boring, and the rules to describe this movement would be incredibly long and complex. Besides, I was designing a game not a simulation, and games are suppose to be fun.

The black hole is one of the small variety, ala Steve Hawkins. It is about the size of a BB, but masses a Ceres size asteroid. The three base structures hold the black hole in place through directed gravity waves. This is similar to the way guide lines, through a balance of push and pull, help a tall TV tower to remain erect. Each of the bases has its own black hole to create the needed gravity waves.

The Graphics:

The cover art is first-rate and certainly has helped sell games. Although I inidicated the asteroid was smooth and regular in shape (it being an alien artifact), I am willing to allow a certain artistic license in such things as cover art. Besides, an edgeless, symmetrical torus on the cover would not have been as dramatic as Gary Kalin's rough, irregular asteroid with its mysterious dark center.

BLACK HOLE's interior art by Robert Manns is beautiful and quite striking, but none of it even comes close to accurately depicting the combat units. I emphasized on a number of occasions these were transport vehicles in the asteroid belt, and therefore, there was no need to give them an aerodynamic appearance. However, what I got was sleek, smooth, turbo-powered space ships. Since the counters contain silhouettes of these spaceships, I find them discomforting. But the counter representing the transport tugs, which serve as ferries for the combat units, is absolutely embarrassing. They resemble B-52's with modified nose sections which contains a set of wings. I cringe each time I see those counters, and in my game set I have substituted WarpWar counters for them. The base counters are excellent with a nice alien mode to them.

The map is precisely what I wanted: a simple style with easily identifiable terrain features. Ben Ostrander did a fine job of laying it out, and I haven't kidded him too much about losing hex B-28.

Final Comments:

Being as objective as possible, I would give BLACK HOLE a B—. While it is a good game, an above average game with a definite SF flavor, it is flawed. It was a hell of a game to design, but it is not a hell of a game. I do hope you buy BLACK HOLE, because, in spite of my mistakes, you will find it most enjoyable.

SHIPS & SWORDS

Naval Melee

by

Glenn L. Williams

SHIPS & SWORDS: Naval Melee is an 'official' TFT article. Steve Jackson, the designer of IN THE LABYRINTH, has approved the article. It has no conflicts with TFT: ITL and can be used in that system when it is available. Readers of the Space Gamer are invited to comment on Naval Melee, and let us know if a full sized Micro on the subject would be of interest.

The sea has fascinated men since before the great epics. She has inspired their myths and provided their livelihood. Her seemingly endless expanse and the unknown lands beyond her horizon have fueled man's drive to expand his own limits. Inevitably, the sea became a battleground -- a meeting place for warriors. Men who took to the sea and fought on its surface were special: there was a romance about them which, thousands of years later, could still hold audiences with tales of Argonauts and Golden Fleece, or even Blackbeard on the Spanish Main.

Recently, several fantasy role playing systems have been expanded into the watery realm of Lord Poseidon. THE FANTASY TRIP's combat system, MELEE, readily adapts to such an expansion. All the players need are guides for action on rolling decks, and some adventures for inspiration. The following are suggestions for additional rules needed, including guides for building your own ships to "go a sailing", and some classic settings for naval actions. My suggestions center in and around the Mediterranean Sea and the British coast, but could readily be adapted to sail further: samurai and junks or Polynesians in double-canoes are possible. The adventures suggested are small ship to ship actions, as larger battles are beyond the scope of the game system.

The first section covers the additional rules. The second is a guide to four battles: an epic Greek ambush which might have occurred but did not; two hypothetical Roman battles against pirates; and finally an amphibious landing under Julius Caesar.

THE RULES

1.0 The basic rules are MELEE.

You may find it necessary to combine counters from all three FANTASY TRIP games. Of course, there are excellent plastic miniatures such as Atlantic's Greeks, Trojans and Romans or Airfix's Romans and Brittons.

2.0 SHIPS

2.1 *Construction*— Ships are simply hex sheets cut into appropriate shapes to represent the deck area. Illustrated are the three ship types: 1) a small "cutter"; 2) a squat merchantman; and 3) a sleek warship. Having cut the deck sheet, glue it to poster board, then trim, leaving a small margin. I found Elmer's School Glue held better than Lepage's or rubber cement and did not curl or warp the ships as it dried. When the ships are dry, divide them into zones (see 2.2), and draw the special areas onto the merchantman's deck (see 2.3).

2.2 *Ship zones*— The ships are too small for the megahexes used for missile fire, therefore, they are divided into zones which serve the same function.

2.3 The merchantman has two special areas, one representing an open hatch; the other, a cabin with deck on top. The areas are drawn as rectangles for artistic purposes, but actually, if a hex contains part of the hatch or cabin deck it is entirely hatch or cabin deck. The cabin deck can only be reached by the stairs.

2.4 *Boarding ramps*— These are made from two-hex pieces of hex paper made in the same fashion as ships.

2.5 *Ships' crews*— Generally, only the combative portion of a ship's complement is represented. In some cases, there are provisions for a crew arming itself and coming to the aid of its fellows. Otherwise, crews are slaves.

2.6 *Ship placement*— No map is used, except in the amphibious scenario. Rather, the cut-outs are placed next to each other, but far enough apart to allow a boarding ramp to be placed between them (see illustration five). The gap thus created can be spanned by ramps or jumping (see movement).

3.0 EQUIPPING FIGURES

There are many different types of troops and the following sections standardize them.

3.1 *Greeks*— These are Achaeans of the Homeric period. ST and DX 12, leather armor, large shield, and either a short sword or spear.

3.2 *Romans*

3.2.1 *Marines*— ST and DX 12, leather armor, large shield, spear and dagger. Unlike most other figures, they fight at their normal DX on shipboard because their training and experience prepared them to fight on a rolling deck and in the confined space of an ancient ship's deck.

3.2.2 *Legionaries*— ST and DX 12, chainmail, large shield, short sword and dagger. They have left their pila behind as too cumbersome.

3.2.3 *NCOs*— A Roman unit is composed of eight troops, some archers, and an NCO called an optio. The optio is equipped like his troops, but has ST and DX of 13.

3.2.4 *Auxiliary archers*— ST 9, DX 15, chainmail, small bow, short sword and dagger. The short sword is used at a –4 DX (to make up for the fact that they carried such a weapon but were not good with it -- too heavy and cumbersome).

3.3 *Pirates*

3.3.1 *Swordsmen*— ST 12, DX 14, leather armor, small shield and broadsword. All pirates, being used to fighting on board ship, fight at their normal DX, like marines.

3.3.2 *Archers*— ST 9, DX 16, no armor, small bow, and dagger.

3.3.3 *Leaders*— ST 14, DX 15, chainmail, large shield, broadsword and dagger.

3.4 *Barbarians*— ST 13, DX 14, leather armor, broadsword, and large shield. Leaders are the same except ST 14, DX 15.

3.5 Intelligence for all except leaders is 10. Roman NCOs have an intelligence of 12, pirate leaders 14 (cunning devils!), barbarians 11. All Greeks, even leaders, have an intelligence of 10.

3.6 The dexterity penalty for everyone except pirates and marines is applied after all adjustments for armor, position, etc.

4.0 LEADERSHIP

The function of a leader is to keep everyone fighting in the situations which will follow. Consequently, whenever a leader falls (slips, becomes unconscious, or dies), all his troops must make a 3-die saving roll against their own intelligence. Failure means they may only defend until they make a saving roll during a plotting segment. A 17 or 18 means panic; the figure dives off the ship (or flees) and is lost.

5.0 MOVEMENT

5.1 *New option: lower boarding ramp*— Two figures adjacent to each other on a deck edge may attempt to lower a boarding ramp onto the enemy ship. Their action occurs when the lower DX figure is able to act. Place a boarding ramp between the ships so that it forms a continuous hex path from one ship to the other. A lowered boarding ramp cannot be removed. Movement across a boarding ramp is ordinary movement and may begin that turn.

5.2 Jumping— Any figure beginning his turn on a deck edge hex may attempt to jump to the other ship if he has selected either movement or charge attack options. The movement is to the nearest enemy ship hex. The figure must make a saving roll of 3 die against DX. Failure means he fell down in the *target* hex, but a 17 or 18 means he fell between the ships and was lost. There is no movement allowed after the jump; combat may occur.

5.3 *Stairs*— The stairs on the merchantman are more like a ladder. They take all a figure's movement to climb up or down.

6.0 COMBAT

6.1 *Missile fire*— Treat the zones exactly as megahexes for missile DX adjustment purposes. There is considered to be an additional zone between the two ships.

6.2 Fighting a figure above you on the stairs is at a minus one DX penalty, while fighting a figure below you on the stairs is at a plus one DX bonus. Figures on the cabin cannot attack those on the deck, except with thrown or missile weapons, and vice versa.

6.3 Whenever a figure would be pushed off a ship deck, cabin deck or into the hatch of a merchantman, he must make a saving roll against DX. Success means the figure drops prone in the hex he occupies. Failure has different meanings depending on the circumstances:

6.3.1 Being pushed off the ship into the sea is the same as being killed.

6.3.2 Being pushed off a cabin deck requires the figure to take a one die of damage (without armor benefit), and he lies prone in the new hex.

6.3.3 Being pushed into the hatch means the figure takes one die damage and returns to a hatch edge hex two turns later, prone.

KEEN BRONZE AND THE WINE-DARK SEA: The Ambush of Telemachus

The first adventure and battle is drawn from Homer's epic *The Odyssey.* Odysseus' son Telemachus has sailed away in search of news of his wandering father. At home, his mother, loyal Penelope, is pressed by suitors to choose one for a new husband. The suitors are parasites who drink Odysseus' wine and slaughter his cattle. Telemachus, having grown to manhood, is a threat to them, and several decided to ambush him at sea. In the epic, Athena steered the young man around the ambush. The following assumes she did not, preferring to test him.

Set-up: Two small cutters side by side. Telemachus has six friends (3.1 Greeks). Telemachus has ST 13, DX 15, leather armor, short sword and small shield. The suitors are eight Greeks, plus a ninth, their leader Antinoos, a normal Greek.

Victory conditions: The suitors must kill Telemachus; his friends must prevent it.

Special rule: Beginning with the first turn Telemachus kills a suitor, Athena lends her aid by making his shield magical. The minus one hit absorption of the shield becomes a minus three. If used in a shield rush option, the defender must make a saving roll against intelligence in order to use any option other than defend. Any suitor struck by the shield takes one ST point damage, regardless of armor.

POMPEY AND THE PIRATES

Naval commerce was vital to the Roman state, as the Mediterranean carried her grain, raw materials and finished goods, as well as governmental couriers. In the period between 70 and 67 BC, piracy had nearly destroyed Roman naval commerce. Plutarch described the pirate force as one thousand galleys operating from secret coves, sympathetic ports, and four hundred captured towns. Important officials were kidnapped from their lavish villas, temples, sacred since the Greek and Persian wars, were desecrated, more humiliating were cities far inland which the pirates sacked. Worse, they flaunted themselves, and that disgusted Plutarch who described them:

". . .they were even more odious for their ostentation than they were feared for their force. Their ships had gilded masts at their stems; the sails woven of purple, and the oars plated with silver, as if their delight were to glory in their iniquity. There was nothing but music and dancing, banqueting and revelry, all along the shore."

Pompey was voted wide powers, making him an emperor in fact, if not in name, throughout the Mediterranean basin. He divided the area into thirteen regions, raised one hundred and twenty thousand infantry, five thousand horse and five hundred ships. He struck simultaneously, and swept the region clear in ninety days. He paid particular attention to the pirates' vital shore bases, depriving them of havens and supplies. Surprisingly, most pirates were not slaughtered, but resettled.

There were many naval actions pitting gilded pirates against grim legionaries, but there must also have been smaller actions, especially toward the end of the campaign. The first scenario is a conventional action, the second a strictly hypothetical "Q-ship" engagement.

Scenario One: Off the Greek coast, a pirate ship has been chased, outmaneuvered, and grappled by a Roman bireme of equal size. Marcus Gaius Lepron, optio of the third century, second cohort, twenty-third legion, is eager to prove his worth as an independent commander. An Egyptian, he has adopted Roman manners, speech and even a Roman name. Now he feels the opportunity for Roman glory.

Set-up: Two large warships. Each has two boarding ramps available. The Roman contigent is an eight man squad of legionaries, four archers, and the option. The initial pirate force is six swordsmen, two archers and a leader. If he is killed, there are no pirate reinforcements.

Victory conditions: The Romans must kill the pirate leader and subdue or kill his followers. The pirates have no choice but to kill all the Romans.

Scenario Two: The pirates still at sea have been running short of food, but are increasingly wary of Roman ships. The commander of the Tunisian coast has decided upon a novel tactic: place a volunteer contingent on a merchantman to be offered as bait, then "ambush" any pirate ship that takes the bait.

Set-up: A large warship (the pirates) is alongside a merchantman. A squad of marines with an optio is below deck. Hidden on the cabin deck are four marine archers, who (like marines) file at normal DX on shipboard, but have the characteristics given for orders. The marines may not appear until at least one pirate is on the ship. They appear ready to fight in any hex adjacent to the hatch. The archers may appear on any turn. The pirate may freely place two boarding ramps before the game begins. The pirates have ten swordsmen and a leader. The leader must get on the merchantman during first turn and may not leave until all his troops have left or been killed.

Victory conditions: Kill or subdue the other side.

FOLLOW THE EAGLE: Caesar's Landing in Britain

Caesar's *Commentaries* are full of desperate battles and brave deeds, but he reserved great praise for a standard bearer during one of the British landings. His troops were unaccustomed to amphibious operations, especially opposed landings. The British warriors were regarded with an almost mystical awe by the legionaries. Veterans stood on the decks of their transports paralyzed by fear until an eagle bearer jumped into the water and waded ashore. The legion's eagle was a religious emblem under divine protection; to lose one was the worst disgrace a legion could sustain. The veterans followed their eagle to protect it, and they won. This scenario represents the landing by a small transport on the edge of the fleet.

Set-up: A cutter is placed so that its first two hex rows overlap with the first three hex rows of a WIZARD mapboard. On it are two squads of legionaries, led by an optio. All hexes of the map are beach sand, and movement is halved. The darker areas are tidal pools and movement is not permitted through them. The legionaries may only land on a turn when they have rolled successfully against intelligence. As each rolls successfully, he *must* land. The NCO can land any move. To land, place the troop on an adjacent beach hex. He

may move no further (charge attack is permissible). Opposing forces are twelve barbarians and a leader who enter on the fifth turn through the opposite map edge.

Victory conditions: The Roman must unload all his troops, kill the barbarian leader and kill or drive off the rest. The barbarian must kill all Romans.

Special rule: barbarian panic— When their leader dies, all barbarians must make a saving roll against intelligence or immediately begin to move at full speed off the map. Survivors may fight to the death.

CONCLUSION

So much of the ancient world and its centers bordered on the sea that many adventures are possible, particularly within a campaign framework. I hope these ideas provide an inspiration. Many of the more complex areas have been avoided, such as ramming and ship maneuver. These are fruitful areas for players to work out. The MELEE and WIZARD systems are flexible enough to allow tremendous expansion limited only by imagination. A fair wind and a strong arm to the oars!

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4. Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans,* "Pompey", Great Books of the Western World, Chicago, IL, 1952.

5. Saxtorph, Neils, *Warriors and Weapons of Early Times,* Macmillan, New York, 1972. This has an excellent picture of a Roman marine. In addition, it is the best inexpensive reference for soldiers from early Egypt and Sumeria through Marlborough, including Samurai and Huns!

6. Simkins, Michael, *The Roman Army from Caesar to Trajan,* Hippocrene, New York, 1974. One of the Men at Arms series, this book has the typically excellent color plates (as does Saxtorph) which are valuable to those who wargame with miniatures.

7. Webster, Graham, *The Imperial Roman Army,* Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1969. He covers Roman organization down to the "squad", plus arms, armor and tactics. He also includes a substantial section on the neglected Roman navy.

FIGURE ONE: A Cutter or small Ship

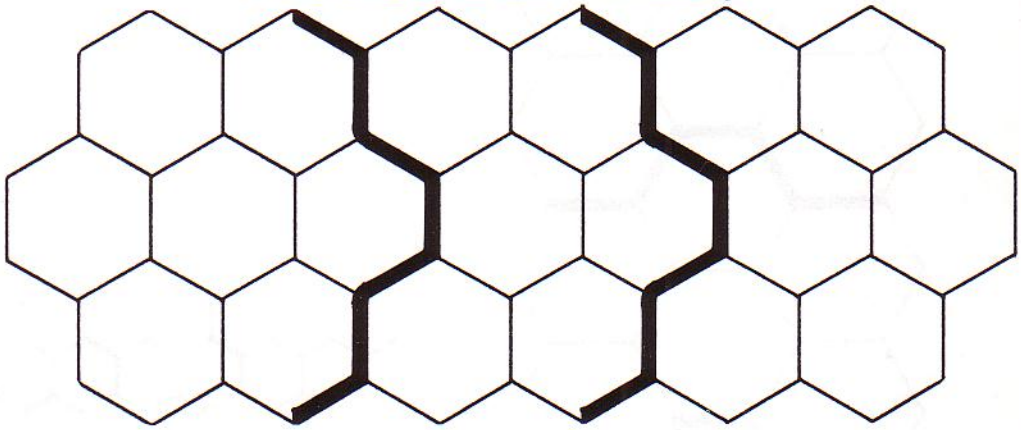


FIGURE TWO: A Merchantman

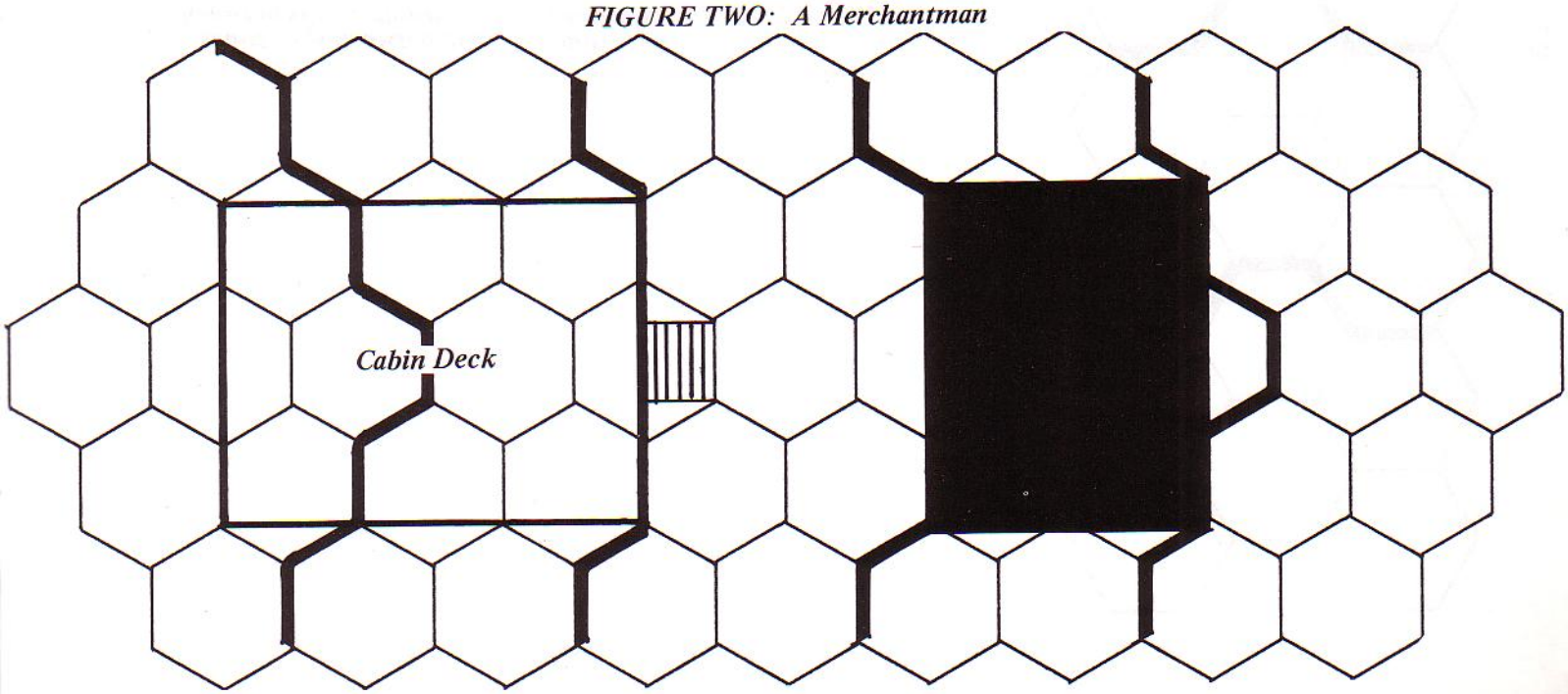
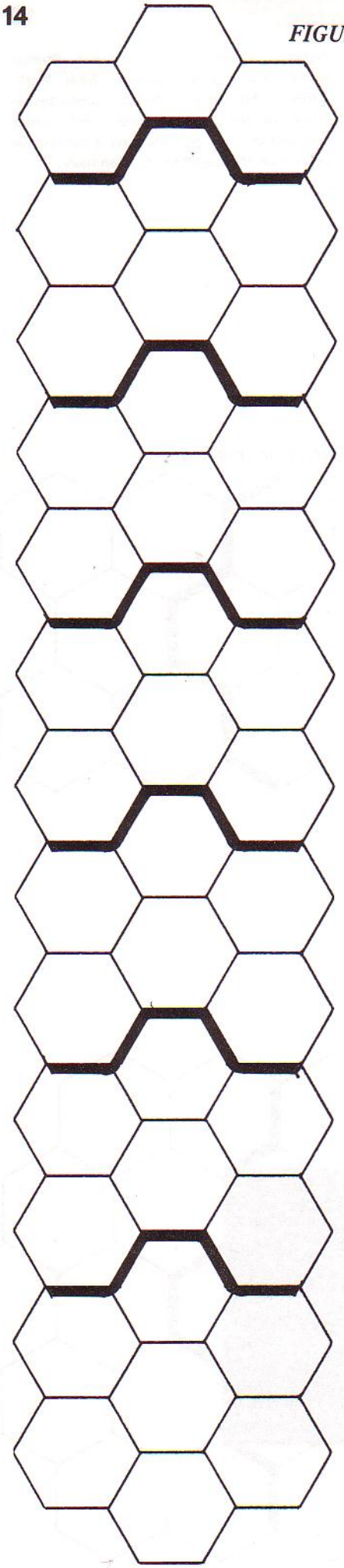


FIGURE THREE: A Warship



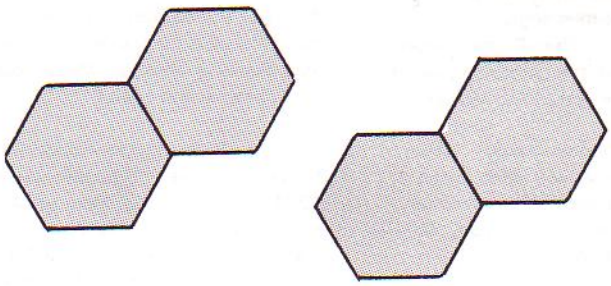


FIGURE FOUR: Boarding Ramps

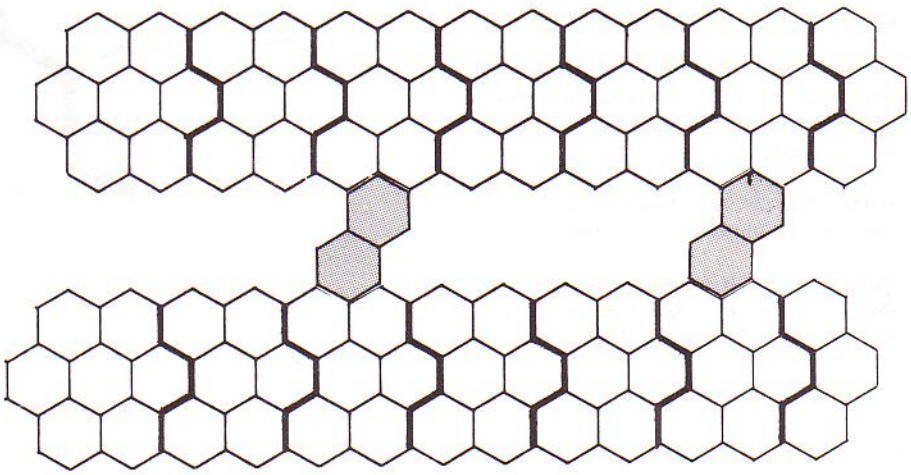
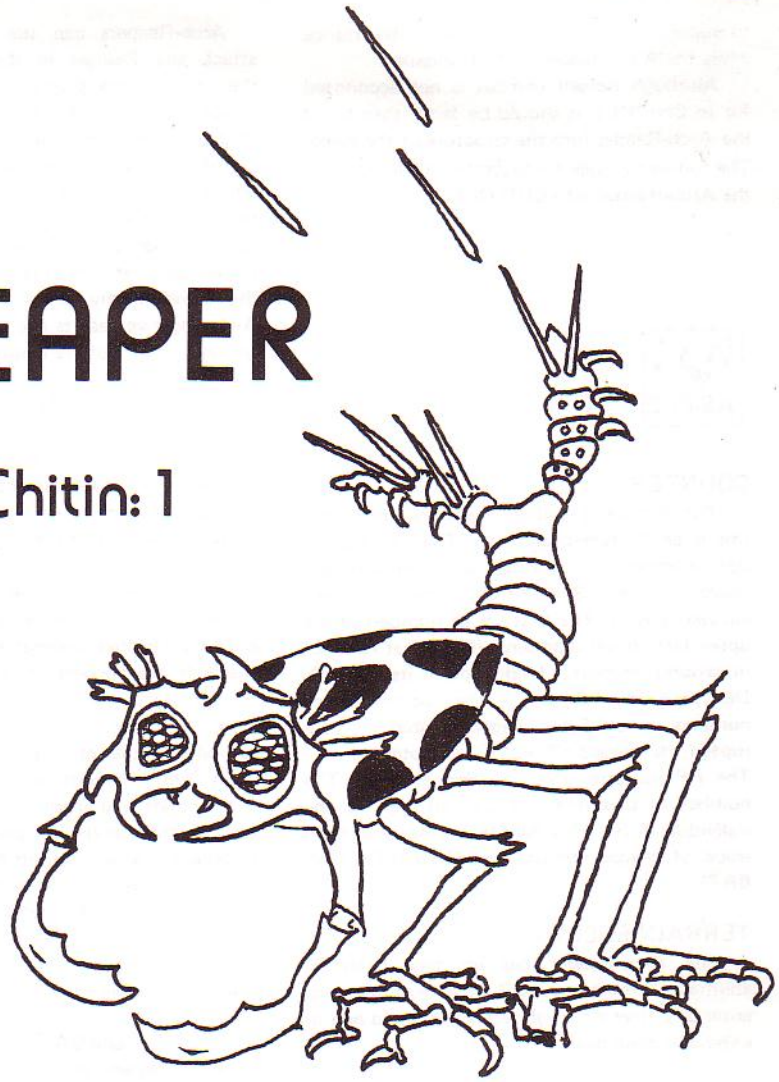


FIGURE FIVE: Two warships with boarding ramps between them. Note that the ship zones and the between ship zones correspond.

THE ARCH-REAPER

Ranged Combat for Chitin: 1

by
Larry Blincoe



CHITIN:I derives much of its unique appeal from the characteristics of its various combat units. While these units have the usual differences in strength and mobility, they also possess an added dimension in that each unit has a different fighting style which gives it an advantage over some units and makes it vulnerable to the smashing charges of Gantuas, but are able to hack their way through Low Renders fairly easily. Renders find the soft underbellies of the Phlanx to be a natural target; Phlanx, in turn, find the giant Gantua an easy target for their thrusting charge attack. In the current game, the airborne Plunges incur no combat advantages. But, whether by hacking, smashing, rending, plunging, or thrusting, all Hymenopterans inflict blows at close quarters.

The premise behind CHITIN:I's varied combat units-genetic manipulation for specialized warfare, raises the specter of the Hymenoptera developing their own type of arms race, one in which every genetic mutation is examined for promising combat features. Individuals with promising characteristics would be used to breed improvements or even entirely new warrior types into the hive. Given their prolific birthrate, it would seem inevitable that at some point in their evolution, the Hymenoptera would discover and develop the advantages of ranged warfare. One possible outgrowth of this development is the Arch-Reaper.

Originally a mutated Phlanx, the Arch-Reaper reached its present form only after several hundred generations of manipulated breeding. It retains roughly the same size and dimensions as the Phlanx, but little else is recognizable. The small thrusting Phlanx forelimbs have become razor-sharp, sickle-like appendages which are most effective for severing the limbs of opponents. The long, lance-like appendages of the phlanx have disappeared completely, but the Reaper maintains some of its thrusting capability through a single horn in the center of its head. Its eyes are set deep inside its chitenous faceplate for protection during thrusting attacks with the horn.

The most revolutionary development in the Arch-Reaper, however, is its abdomen which has evolved from primarily defensive club-like use into the Reapers major offensive strength. The original mace shaped tail has become a muscular split appendage in which dozens of sharp spikes now grow. Using the enormous strength of its tail and the leverage of its body, the Reaper can hurl these spikes with great force at enemy formations, decimating their ranks before the two sides engage. By controlling muscles surrounding the spikes, the Reaper can hurl all or only part of its weaponery, holding some in reserve for later barrages. Short fixed spikes on the sides of the appendage serve as mace-like gouging weapons in close combat. A third set of legs has developed

to support the body in a catapult-like stance while the Arch-Reaper hurls its missiles.

Although ranged combat is not accounted for in CHITIN:I, it should be fairly easy to fit the Arch-Reaper into the structure of the game. The following rules are suggested for integrating the Arch-Reaper into CHITIN:I.

COUNTER:

The silhouette and A- R abbreviation show this is an Arch-Repear unit. The single black dot indicates it is a single unit (all A-Rs are single units--see STACKING). The movement allowance is 4. The first set of numbers in the upper left corner represents its combat strength in ground combat. Undisrupted, its CS is 3. Disrupted, its CS is 2. The second set of numbers is its CS for ranged combat. Undisrupted, its ranged CS is 16. Disrupted, it is 8. The RP indicates this is a Reaper unit. The number in parenthesis is used to identify the individual A-R. This may be necessary to keep track of ranged combat (see RANGED COMBAT).

TERRAIN EFECTS:

The Arch-Reaper has no special terrain abilities. It must expend 2 movement points to enter any river or rough terrain hex, and one to enter any plain hex.

STACKING:

With the exception of Basics and Workers, A-R units will not stack with any other units until all of their missiles are spent. They need room to hurl their weaponry, and will not tolerate any other warrior units, including other Arch-Reapers, in their hex. After all of their missiles have been thrown, they will stack with other A-Rs.

RANGED COMBAT:

Arch-Reapers may make one ranged combat attack (or defense) with a CS of 16 or two ranged combat attacks, each with a CS of 8. When disrupted, these combat strengths are halved. An attack by a disrupted A-R uses up the undisrupted combat strength--EXAMPLE: An A-R is disrupted. It attacks using its disrupted CS of 8. It has therefore spent all its missiles and cannot make any more ranged attacks. Had it used a disrupted strength of 4, it would still have 8 CS left (undisrupted) for a second attack.

The players must keep track of each A-Rs remaining ranged combat strength. In games where only a few A-Rs are used, this is fairly easy. In larger scenarios, the identifying number in parenthesis on each counter should be used and a list kept for all A-R units.

Ranged combat attacks can be made on any enemy ground unit within 4 hexes of the A-R (the same as its movement allowance). Terrain has no effect on ranged combat.

Arch-Reapers can use ranged combat to attack any Plunges in the same Megahex as they are. If the plunges are broken into two attacking groups, the A-R can attack only one of the groups on that turn.

When making ranged attacks against non-adjacent ground troops or plunges, A-Rs never suffer negative results unless the attack was against another A-R which was also using ranged combat. If other friendly units attack the same enemy units in unison with the A-R, negative results are applied to the other friendly units, but are ignored for the A-R.

INTERVENING UNITS-OPTIONAL RULE

This rule requires that any units adjacent to the hex an A-R is attacking with ranged combat be accounted for if such a unit is between the A-R and its target. If the intervening unit is friendly, the A-R cannot attack. If the intervening unit is an enemy unit, the ranged CS of the A-R is halved for the attack, but any negative combat results indicated for the A-R are applied to the intervening units. If other friendly units are involved in the attack, the negative results are applied to them as well as to the intervening enemy units.

A unit is considered to be intervening if a straight line from the center of the A-Rs hex to the center of the target hex passes through the adjacent units hex.

Also under this rule, A-Rs may not combine their strength with friendly Plunges to attack enemy Plunges in a single attack. Obviously, in this situation there would be an equal chance of hitting friend or foe.

GROUND COMBAT:

Arch-Reapers do not need Basics for command control. In developing their skills with missiles, they achieved a level of intelligence which enabled them (like Plunges) to operate without command control.

A-Rs do not charge attack. Although descended from the Phlanx, their primary combat advantage no longer lies in thrusting charges, and they have lost this ability.

When A-Rs are involved in combat with adjacent enemy forces, they may use their ground combat strength, their remaining ranged CS, or both.

COMBAT ADDS:

A-Rs are affected by combat adds for facing just as other units are. They do not however, receive combat adds when using only ranged combat against a non-adjacent enemy.

When an A-R attacks Plunges with its full ranged combat strength of 16, it receives one combat add for each Plunge unit attacked. Plunges each receive single combat adds for attacking disrupted A-Rs.

MULTIPLE ATTACKS:

Multiple attacks are not allowed. A-Rs may attack only one hex each turn. They cannot attack an adjacent hex with their ground CS and a different hex with their ranged CS. Neither can they attack two separate hexes with their ranged CS on the same turn.

UNIT LIMITS:

As a practical matter, the number of A-R units allowed in each scenario should be limited both because of record keeping (easy for 2 or 3 units, a pain for 10 or 20), and because of play balance. The following limits are suggested; Basic and Small scenarios - 2, Intermediate scenario - 3, Bitter End scenario - 4, Armageddon scenario - 6.

Given the Arch-Reapers fairly high potential for decimating troops, A-R units should be treated as additions to CS point limits, rather than as part of them (i.e.--the Basic scenario uses 48 points of Cs, plus 2 A-R units).

CALL FOR GAME DESIGNS

In issue No. 19 of THE SPACE GAMER Metagaming called for MicroGame designs. This has resulted in several publishable games. We would like to repeat that call for MicroGame designs again.

If you've previously submitted a design not accepted, it may be resubmitted. A number of gamers submitted games that could be acceptable with more play-testing and better written rules. They are encouraged to continue work if the game still holds their interest.

Designers should also note the fee for a second accepted design is $750 and $1,000 for the third design. You can't get rich, but you do get paid for turning a hobby idea into a playable game.

Working by mail is more difficult than face-to-face methods. More demands are placed on the designer for a completely playtested and edited game. A designer will be expected to achieve good quality in all of the following:

1. Playtesting: Any design submitted must be playtested. We can easily spot games that haven't been played competitively. So, be sure you try your idea on other people before sending it.

2. All components necessary for play must be submitted, except dice.

3. Rules must be well written technically. If you don't follow the rules of correct English, others can't understand your ideas.

4. Try to do something new, even if only from a different viewpoint. Don't send games based on books, movies, TV or other games. You could, for example, do a Battle of The Bulge game, but not one that requires the use of another company's game as a start.

5. Don't send us complex involved games. Micros are for fun which means easy to learn, easy to play and no tortured rules.

6. Don't count on us: Ideas are cheap. Everyone has a lot of ideas, good ones, that *could* make good, even great, games. The idea is the easy part, we've got'em too. What we're going to pay you for is the hard work if implementing that idea into a fun, playable game. Don't expect us to take your rough notes and a few ideas and make you a great game-- that's your job.

The topics we'd like to see Micros on are pretty wide open, the following categories should be a guide.

1. Historical MicroGames: These should be fun, balanced, playable games. Abstraction of historical themes is more important than historical accuracy. Maps may be of actual terrain. The most popular themes and time periods would be suitable for MicroGames. Tactical level games are probably most suitable for MicroGames.

2. Science fiction MicroGames: These can be planetary tactical games, space combat tactical, or something else. The emphasis for this group is imaginative themes with a "hard science" fiction content. Current Micros published are representative of what is wanted, but don't think of them as the limit.

3. Fantasy games: (Steve Jackson, Editorial Coordinator) These should all be related to THE FANTASY TRIP game system. MicroQuest concepts such as DEATH TEST are suitable. Anything else original and not a stand alone game could also fit the MicroQuest format.

As soon as THE FANTASY TRIP: IN THE LABYRINTH is out, all MicroQuests should use those rules as their base. Remember, tunnel grubbing isn't the limit of fantasy adventure. There are a lot of other viable themes that can make great solitaire, programmed quests.

There will be many who want to send us "big" games. That's okay, but, your chances are slim. We want to see a Micro first. They are easily evaluated and show your skill.

Do not be disappointed if several rounds of improvements are necessary before a game is ready for publication. Working by mail takes time. The effort is worth it for a quality game.

The form reproduced with this article is the form you should submit with your game design. If you send us an idea and ask if we're interested all we can say is, "we'd have to see it in playtestable form to know". So, send us games, not ideas. The game is the measure, not the concept.

TO: Howard Thompson
Metagaming
Box 15346
Austin, TX 78761

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I am submitting to Metagaming for evaluation a game I have designed entitled

_____.

My submission of my game design to Metagaming constitutes an offer to sell the design to Metagaming. This offer to sell includes all my present and future rights to reproduce the game in any form.

A complete copy of the game is attached for your evaluation. The following list of components is the complete game necessary for playtesting.

1.	7.
2.	8.
3.	9.
4.	10.
5.	11.
6.	12.

I certify that this game design offered for sale to Metagaming is entirely the product of my creative effort and that I hold all rights to the game design. I am legally able to sell this design to Metagaming in its entirety and am so offering it for sale.

I understand that Metagaming will acknowledge receipt of my submission in writing. Acknowledgement of receipt does not constitute a committment of Metagaming to buy the game.

I understand that Metagaming agrees to evalute my game design for possible purchase subject to the following conditions.

1. That this game design is not being concurrently submitted to any other firm for consideration.
2. That Metagaming will advise me of its decision within 90-180 days of my submission.
3. That the nature of Metagaming's decision will be as follows.
   a. The game design is rejected for publication. Metagaming will not buy the design and the designer is free to do with the design what he will.
   b. The design is accepted and will be purchased by Metagaming for no less than $500. More than $500 may be paid in certain cases.
   c. The design is accepted conditional upon the designer making revisions and improvements as specified.
4. Metagaming reserves the right to correct, alter or revise game designs purchased in the interest of efficient production.

Date_____Designer_____

Design Received

Date_____Signature_____

MICROGAME SPECIFICATIONS

DESIGN CONSTRAINTS

Rules: Approximately 4,000-7,000 words long
Maps: Two to six 4 1/8" x 7" panels (14" x 8¼", etc.)
Counters: One sheet 4 1/8" x 7 ". Standard game counter is .45" x .45". But, any sizes that can easily fit the sheet will work.

Initial Microgame designs submitted should not plan on more than the basic components list. A decision about using slightly larger components or otherwise enlarging the game will be made by Metagaming.

News & Plugs

GAMING CONVENTIONS:

PACIFICON '79: (Sept. 1-3) Dunfey Hotel, San Mateo, California. The major west coast gaming convention with over 30 boardgame tournaments, plus D&D, seminars, demonstrations, miniatures, and lots of movies. Info: Golden Gate Gamers, PO Box 5833, San Jose, CA 95150.

ATLANTIC GAMES CON: (Oct. 5-8) King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Board games, modeling, miniatures, displays, and seminars. For information contact Paul K. Smith, 2510 Windsor St., Halifax, N.S., Canada B3K-5C1.

COUNCIL OF THE FIVE NATIONS: (Oct. 6-7) This is the fifth annual wargames convention sponsored by the Schenectady War Gamers Association. For information write Gerald D. Seypura, 20 Randi Road A 3, Schenectady, NY 12309.

WINTERCON VIII: (Nov. 16-18) The winter version of MichiCon. WinterCon is sponsored by the Metro Detroit Gamers (probably the best gaming club in the country), and the con has all the usual features. For information: MDG, 2616 Kenwyck, Troy, MI 48098.

WARCON '80: (Feb. 1-3) Memorial Student Center, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. Board games, role-playing, miniatures, seminars, demonstrations, auction, films, and a presentation on micro-computer games. Membership: $4 till 1/15, $5 after. Info: WarCon '80, Box 5718, College Station, TX 77844.

SIMCON II: (March 22-23) River Campus at the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York. The convention will include tournaments in D&D, MicroGames, Diplomacy, Cosmic Encounters, and many others. Info: SimCon II, Box 5142 Riverstation, Rochester, NY.

THINGS THAT CAME IN THE MAIL:

VILLAINS & VIGILANTES is a role-playing game from the fine folks at Fantasy Games Unlimited. In the style of Superhero 2044, V&V offers a comic book style world filled with super-heroes and super-villains. $6, F.G. Unlimited, PO Box 182, Roslyn, NY 11576.

FANTASTIC ENCOUNTERS is a fantasy boardgame for solo adventurers. Designed for a single player, F.E. is quick to master and play. The use of random events cards keep the play interesting. West Coast Games, 1987B Santa Maria Way, Sacramento, CA 95825. $4.95 plus 50 cents postage and handling.

THE DRAGON no. 26: The June issue is a good example of The Dragon's expanding coverage of the hobby. The major feature is an in-depth study of GDW's System 7 Napoleonics. Other articles include the placement of castles in Lords and Wizards, a look at Chinese Undead, and a detailed analysis on the FRP characteristics of Cugel the Clever, Kane, and Tros of Samothrace. The issue also contains variants for Starship Troopers, Boot Hill, and EPT. Along with the regular features (an excellent Sorcerer's Scroll column by Gygax), a new column title Bazaar of the Bizarre, which will feature magical items and spells, premiers; and Featured Creature returns as The Dragon's Bestiary. Subs: 13/$24, single issue $2.10, TSR Hobbies, Inc., PO Box 110, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

MECH WAR 2: This is another of the massive box games we are beginning to get from the folks at SPI. This one is two games, Red Star/White Star and Suez to Golem, with one standard rules book, 2 exclusive rules books, 1600 counters, and 4 22" x 34" maps (take a wheelbarrow to the game store for this one). RS/WS depicts combat between NATO forces and invading Soviets in Germany (SF?). STG includes 13 scenarios from the 1973 Arab/Israeli wars. High complexity, 3-25 hour playing time, and large playing areas will make this game a much discussed design. Available from SPI, Inc., 257 Park Ave. S., NY, NY, 10010. The cost is also hefty, $28 for both, or $15 separately.

RAIDERS & TRADERS is a new game from The Chaosium which covers 'the heroic age of Greece'. This beautifully produced boardgame includes 22' x 34' full-color map, rulesbook, 300 counters, 80 money pieces, and 40 player cards. This game was designed by Don Dupont (TROY) who is a student of archaeology. Several scenarios make this look very interesting. Cost: $12.

SNAKEPIPE HOLLOW is a $5.00, 48 page, 8½ x 11 booklet of Runequest scenarios by Greg Stafford and Rudy Kraft. It is available from The Chaosium.

REICH or The Iron Dream of German Unification is another new boardgame from The Chaosium. REICH portrays Germany between Reformation and Bismark's unification. Components include color map, 300 counters, 80 Reich cards, 80 money tokens, and rules book. Cost is $12. Both of these games are available from The Chaosium, Box 6302, Albany, CA, 94706.

FIRE & MOVEMENT no. 17: An impressive issue from the field's best magazine. A broad study of Drang Nach Osten is the feature article, which includes an analysis of the game, designers' notes, and comments on the play of a game. Other articles cover Middle Earth, Panzerkrieg, Crimean War, and The Next War. The letter column is lively and most interesting. Equally so is the editorial page, which discusses the hows and whys of F&M's game coverage. Their policy, which has been criticized for being to bias toward WWII games, is to include articles on games in proportion to the demand for such articles. A fair and honest policy, and as the policy stated "F&M stands for Fire and Movement, not for fantasy and magic." Subs: 6/$10.50, single issue $2, Baron Publishing Co., PO Box 820, La Puente, CA 91747.

SIGNAL no. 150: This unpretenious memeo newszine (one of my favorites) is published by two true gaming fans. Included in this triple issue are several news releases from numerous gaming companies, game reviews, and a rundown on the contents of all the latest gaming magazines. A very satisfying issue, but now I want all the future Signals to be this size or larger. The post-Origins issue should be most interesting. Subs: 12/$3, John Mansfield, 46 Carleton St., Oromocto, NB, Canada E2V 2C8.

SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTIONS:

NORTHAMERICON: (August 30-Sept.3) Galt House, Louisville, KY. GoH: Frederik Pohl. Mem: $10 till 6/30, $15 after. Info: NorthAmericon, PO Box 58009, Louisville, KY 40258.

PGHLANGE: (Sept. 28-30) Marriott Inn, Pittsburgh, PA. GoH: Gene Wolfe. Mem: $7 till 9/15, $9 after. Info: Barbara Geraud, 1202 Benedum-Trees Bldg., Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

OTHERCON III: (Sept. 28-30) Ramada Inn, College Station, TX. Memberships: $8 till 9/15, $10 after. Guest of Honor: George Martin. Info: OtherCon III, P.O. Box 3933, Aggieland Station, TX 7784.

MOSCON I: (Sept. 29-Oct.1) University Best Western Inn, Moscow, Idaho. GoH: Verna Smith Trestrail (Doc Smith's daughter, Alex Schomberg, Jessica Amanda Salmonson. Mem: $6 till 9/1, $8 after. Info: Moscon I, P.O. Box 9141, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

FIFTH WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION: (Oct. 12-14) Biltmore Plaza, Providence, RI. GoHs: Frank Belknap Long, Stephen King. Mem: $15 till 9/1, $20 after, $3 supporting. Info: 5th World Fantasy Convention, 43 Kepler St., Pawtucket, RI 02860.

CONCLAVE: (Nov. 2-4) Ramada Inn Metro, Romuslus, MI. GoH: A.E. Van Vogt. Mem: $6 till 9/16, $8 after. Info: EMU SF Society, 117 Goodison, Ypsilanti, MI 48197.

PHILCON '79: (Nov. 9-11) Sheraton Valley Forge Hotel, King of Prussia, PA. GoH: Joan Vinge. Mem: $6 till 10/1, $8 after. Info: OryCon, PO Box 985, Beaverton, OR 97005.

NUTRIACON (Nov 30-Dec. 2) Grand Hotel, New Orleans, LA. GoH: Karl Edward Wagner, Bob Tucker, George Alec Effinger. Mem: $6 till 10/31, $9 after. Info: Tom Longo, 6221 Wadsworth, New Orleans, LA 70122.

CHATTACON FIVE: (Jan. 4-6) Sheraton Downtown, Chattanooga, Tennessee. GoH: Joan Vinge. Mem: $7 till 9/30. Banquet $10. Info: ChattaCon, PO Box 211173, Chattanooga, TN 37421.

The Four Howitzer Defense in OGRE

by Chester Hendrix

Not many OGRE players like the Howitzer. That's a shame because the Howitzer, when properly placed and used, can be a devastating part of your defensive style, especially in the Basic Game scenario against the MarkIII Ogre. The problem is that most players don't use the Howitzer correctly.

When first playing OGRE, the average newcomer will grab one or two Howitzers. He usually does this for two reasons - 1) the obvious firepower and range, and 2) because taking more than one or two Howitzers will limit the amount of mobile armor units left for maneuvering around the Ogre. After a few bad experiences of not being able to get a hit with the Howitzers, or having them overrun without getting off more than a few shots -- if any -- the Howitzer quickly becomes the most unused unit in the game.

Admittedly, there is a basic problem in using the Howitzer. The problem is in utilizing only one or two Howitzers, you are left with the very real possibility that you may not get a shot in before your position is overrun or wiped out. And since it can't move, and without some effective support fire, Howitzers have a very short existence potential once the OGRE is within two or three hexes.

The key is in using three or four (preferably four) Howitzers and placing them so their cross fire is at once heavily concentrated *and* mutually supportive. Now, before any one Howitzer can be attacked the Ogre will have to undergo fire from the remaining Howitzers.

Your defense should revolve around defending the Howitzers first, and worrying about the Command Post later. I have found the best way to do this is to have your mobile ground forces throw everything in the first attacks at the Ogre's main battery. Any units left over should then go for the missiles if 2:1 odds or better can be achieved. Otherwise, hit the treads with any unused attack factors.

If still operational, the next Ogre armament target must be the missiles. The reason for initial attacks on the main battery is to provide ground units (and later the Howitzers) more protection by limiting the range of the Ogre. Always channel extra attack factors into hits on the treads. Every tread you hit means more turns to slow the Ogre down once he's within range of your Howitzers. This won't matter much if he still has his main battery and missiles intact.

In addition to staging your attacks on the Ogre, placement of the Howitzers for maximum coverage and mutual support fire is crucial to your set up. The positions of the Howitzers in the diagram at hexes 1205, 1109, 0809, and 0706 (NOTE: this is the second edition board) gives you this effect. The Ogre cannot reach any Howitzer-- except with missiles--without first undergoing fire from at least three Howitzers for one turn. This is assuming the worst--the Ogre still has his full three movement factors. The less movement factors, the greater the mutual support fire capability.

You will notice each hex in the diagram is screened to show how many Howitzers can fire into each hex. The greatest concentration is closest to the Command Post, making it dangerous for the Ogre to get close until all Howitzers are taken out, using up valuable extra turns which can make the difference in a win or loss situation later on.

The Command Post should be positioned at hex 0701 in the Northeast corner. (I was somewhat surprised when the gamer who introduced me to Ogre flipped when I showed him this Command Post placement. It had never occurred to him to place it anywhere but 0404 or 0503) With the Command Post in the corner, the Ogre can attack more than one of the Howitzers (at 1109 and 1205) by advancing along the East edge of the map-- the shortest route to the CP-- *if* the missiles are still functional; by going West a couple of hexes (via 1308 or 1207) the Ogre can still take out both of these Howitzers (even if the missiles are both gone as long as the main battery is still intact. This is the real reason for knocking out the main battery and missiles.

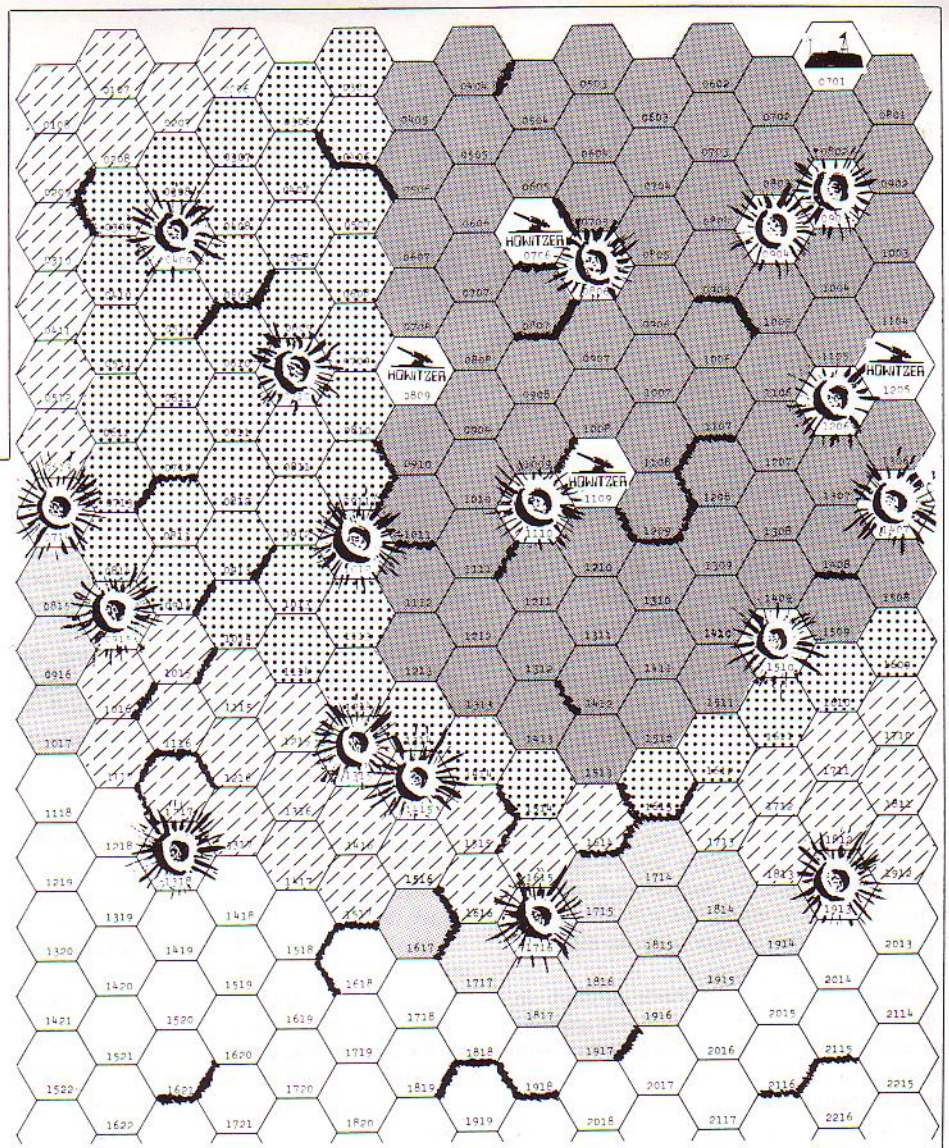
If the Ogre has progressed along the East edge and you have knocked out the main battery and missiles, the Ogre must make a quick decision. A competent defensive player will have reduced the Ogre's main offensive powers and the treads by one movement factor giving the Ogre two choices.

1) Rush the Command Post. This leaves him vulnerable to the remaining Howitzers.

2) Drive on the Howitzers. This wastes precious time which is needed to reach the CP and allows any surviving mobile defensive forces an excellent opportunity to stop the Ogre.

This basic strategy of setting up four Howitzers can be very effective for speaking up your defensive game. The element of surprise in opting for an unconventional force against a conventional player should not be minimized.

To summarize-- after placement of the Howitzers, the first objectives are the main battery, missiles and treads-- in that order. At this point, you can sit back and let the Ogre sweat. Your main worry will be letting your troops be drawn out into the open and destroyed, leaving your Howitzers for defense. If the Ogre hasn't been reduced in offensive firepower and/or movement points, and this happens, you could be in trouble. But, that's all right-- you knew the job was dangerous when you took it.



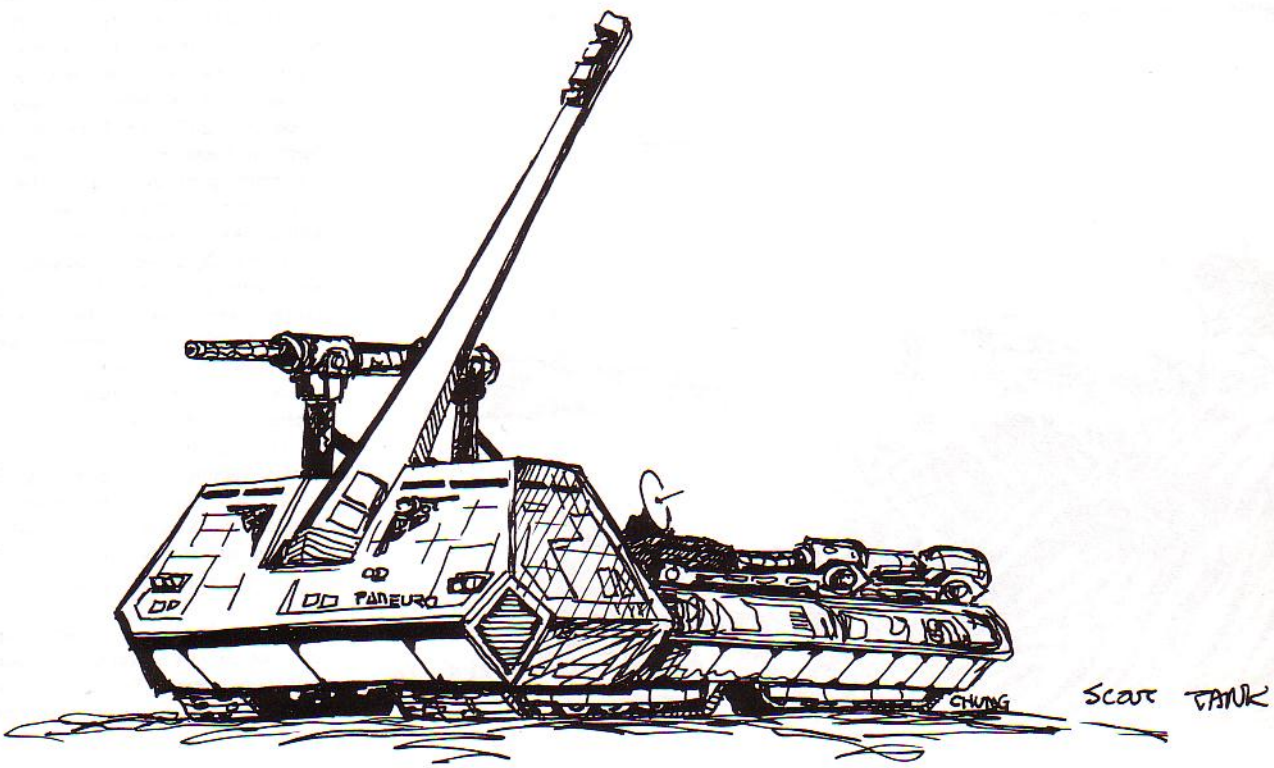
KEY:
The shaded areas represent the number of Howitzers able to fire into any given hex.

4 Howitzers

3 Howitzers

2 Howitzers

1 Howitzer



BARSOOMIAN OPTIONS

System Additions & a Review of JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS

by

John J. Nutter

When I was a lad of about twelve, my grandfather pulled from atop the shelf a dusty, dog eared tome entitled *The Gods of Mars.* It was then that I embarked for Barsoom, a voyage from which I have not yet and never hope to return. In the form of the ADVENTURE GAME, Heritage Models, those good ol' boys down Dallas way, have brought to us a recreation of the exciting life on this most adventuresome of planets. THE JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS ADVENTURE GAMING HANDBOOK, written by Michael Matheny, is a rulebook of some sixty pages, with high quality printing on excellent stock, and a comic bookish, but appropriate cover illustration by Russ Manning.

Upon first perusal, I found the rules to be written in an entertaining style, but one fault is glaringly obvious from the outset. The editing is atrocious! The text is a virtual cornucopia of misspellings. This may seem insignificant, but words are the stock in trade of rulebooks and one should expect better from a rising star in the trade.

The first half of the book contains capsule summaries of the different races and creatures of Barsoom, including quite a bit of detail about the dominant Red and Green cultures. On the whole, I found the information to be quite accurate and a good working basis for the uninitiated player. There is enough here to create a feel for Barsoom without removing incentive for returning to the originals. Included in this section are paragraphs explaining the environment and weaponry of the world.

Upon this sound basis, Mr. Matheny has built a sound combat system and role-playing game which captures much of the flavor of the novels. Movement is performed on a semi-simultaneous basis. At the beginning of the turn, each character selects a movement mode (walk, run, trot) that determines his available movement points for the turn, i.e. if you trot you may move 4, 5, or 6 hexes this turn. Movement points are also used to change facing, and there are rules for tripping and falling. After determining the mode for each character, the referee calls out a strict order in which the players may use their movement points, one at a time according to the speed selected. This creates a lot of interaction and requires forthought and quick decision making which adds excitement to the game.

Combat occurs in two ways. At any time during a move in which a player becomes adjacent to an enemy, he may engage in passing combat. In effect, this is taking a swing on the way past, although at a negative modifier. Some confusion might arise here, as the writer failed to note whether attack factors may be utilized by the movement phase or by the game turn, but my inclination is by the phase.

The combat system is based on a swordsmanship rating for attack and defense, each the total of two dice. This is modified by such factors as strength, finesse, and luck. To attack, the player subtracts the target's defense from his own attack rating and cross references the differential with a die roll. This yields either a miss or a hit number used as a modifier on the wound table, the higher the better. Each wound damages a specific body part with potential long term effects, i.e. two severe wounds sever your sword arm. Each wound also accumulates points against your constitution (3 dice). Here, Mr. Matheny takes an outstanding step by creating the "swoon chart". This chart reflects the shock of injury in this way: As characters take wound points, determine the ratio of total wounds to constitution as a percentage and cross index with a die roll. The greater the number of points taken, the greater the chances the character will be stunned, pass out, or die. Recovery is possible from the first two.

Combat is further modified by such factors as attacker position, wounds, and motivation (+3 for defending the Princess -- I love it!). Players may further choose to modify their attack and defense numbers by adding one to six points to either attack or defense, while subtracting a like number from the opposite. There is also the "web of steel" option which precludes attack, but can add up to eight points to a player's defense. Included are rules for the radium guns, using the standard combat tables modified by range, personal accuracy, and luck. Morale is also a factor in group actions, but the rules are sketchy. Overall, the combat system is exciting and Barsoomian.

The role playing system has a few hitches. In the Adventure Game, players have the option to become a Prince, thereby gaining more dice to roll attributes with, and further adding new qualities such as "Noble Heart". The purpose of being a Prince is, naturally, to get a Princess. Anyone familiar with the stories will know this is easier said than done. Winning the Princess requires the accumulation of Princess points, some of which are a function of your attributes, such as swordsmanship times ten, and others are gained by your dress, first impression (try not to slobber!), and overall bearing. To determine the Princess' choice, the player's Princess points are cross referenced with a die roll, resulting in anything from a rebuff to MY PRINCE, FIREWORKS, THE BIG TIME, HUBBA HUBBA!! If she selects no one, the players venture forth to fight the villians and acquire more points with which to try again. Even if she does select one of you, some love sick villian will immediately kidnap her, necessitating a rescue. In short, the prime motivation for adventuring is the Princess, very true to the Burrough's tradition.

The Adventure Game is played with a magnified time scale with movement given in days, and encounters rolled for daily. A fine set of encounter tables are included. Experience can add to various attributes such as swordsmanship, movement speed, and sixth sense, as well as adding Princess points. There is a good section on referee philosophy, a nice touch which can be applied to almost any role playing game.

At this point, I will diverge to several points which the game fails to include. The major

flaw is the absence of rules for travel by flier (that's with an "i"). As any John Carter buff can attest, fliers play a major role in any story. The only mention in this set of rules are modifiers to the system to be used with the BARSOOMIAN BATTLE MANUAL. I consider this a gross omission, along with the absence of equilibrimotors, martian grav belts. There is no listing of the Princess points for military rank as there should be, and no provisions for recovering from wounds in the campaign. And just to get it out of my system, no self respecting thoat would *rampage at a walk!* These are the elements I fault in a game which generally displays imagination and many good points. Perhaps a little more could have been added to help players flesh out the non-player characters. Princesses of differing beauty resulting in column shifts, or the like. It would also have been imaginative to provide for players being other than red men, although the books are written in that context and I cannot consider the game incorrect. But wouldn't you love to play a six-armed Green man, striving to get ahead in a ruthless society? Again, this is personal preference. I think the game was written for the beginning player mainly, but it does leave some things up in the air for the new referee (without a flier, too!). There should have been a sample street or two, and perhaps a map of simple dungeons and buildings to aid the neophyte. As it stands, I like the combat system and find that with imagination the experienced role-playing gamer will find great enjoyment recreating adventures on Barsoom.

But, aside from introducing me to John Carter, my grandfather also taught me never to criticize without making constructive suggestions. The following are optional rules I use in my own campaign.

MORALE

Even the bravest of men find themselves running against their own will when faced with a bad situation. To reflect this, in combat, each character must make a morale check at the time ¼ of his own party has fallen due to wounds or run away. The procedure is to roll two dice and compare it with his morale number. If the total of the dice equals or is less than his morale number, the player may continue to fight. If the dice roll exceeds the morale, the player must expend all future movement points going away from the site of the combat. His mode shall be "run". He shall continue to run until he has, in the referee's opinion, evaded any pursuit, or for three turns, after which he may attempt to rejoin his comrades by passing another morale check. This second check must be made at –2 to the player's morale.

In addition to the pass/fail result, there are three things which might also occur: When rolling for a morale check, if a player should roll an unmodified two, he will experience the "red haze" of battle. He then rolls one die and adds that number to his attack swordsmanship for one to six turns. The referee should secretly roll the duration on one die.

Should the player's morale check roll be an unmodified three, he will become "rash", adding the roll of one die to his attack number, and subtracting it from his defense. He may not choose to further modify this by using combat status -- this is his combat status. Duration is determined in the same manner as the "red haze".

Should the player's morale check roll be an unmodified twelve, he will stay and fight, but must choose the "web of steel" option (precluding any attacks) for a duration determined by the referee in the manner of the "red haze".

MORALE CHECK MODIFIERS: Apply the following to the morale of each member of the party. In effect, individual morale will increase or decrease for the duration of combat.

Accompanied by: A Prince with personal morale of 18 or more, +3; a Prince with morale of 12-17, +1; a Prince with morale of 8 or less, –2; accompanied by John Carter, +5.

Subtract from morale 1 point for each member of the party over ¼ who have fallen by wounds, and subtract two for each member over ¼ who have run away.

PASSING COMBAT

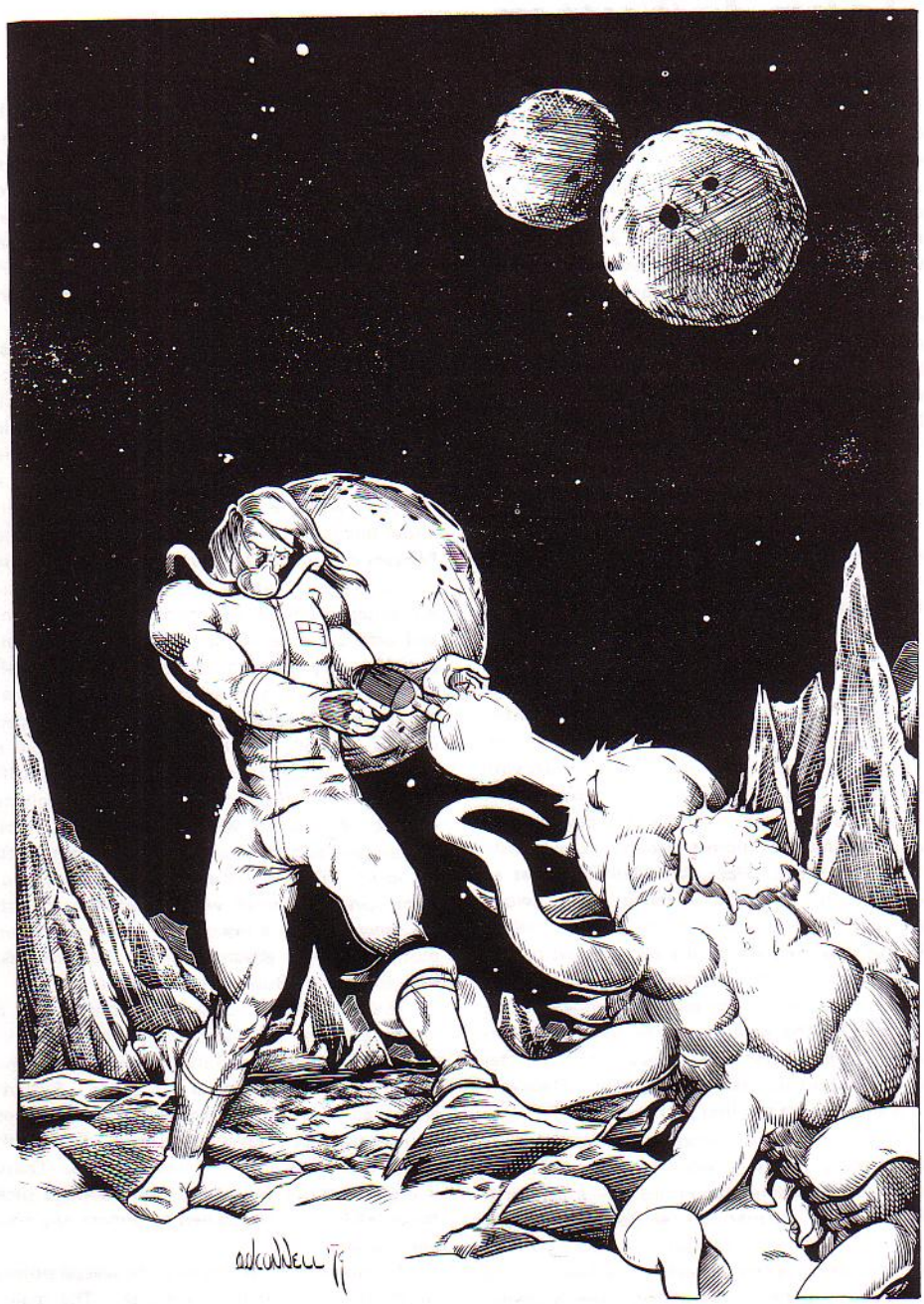
Expend one movement point to engage in passing combat.

FORCING RETREAT

Any time a character inflicts a severe wound upon his opponent, he may force the opponent to retreat one hex (no movement point cost), and to check for tripping at –3 in addition to other modifiers which may apply. Should the opponent have no room to retreat, he must check for tripping at –6 and automatically use ½ defense factor the *succeeding phase.*

DISARMING ATTACKS

The ability to disarm a foe played a major role in the success of John Carter. To reflect this, each player shall be able to choose as a combat status the option, "disarm". He then adds 4, 5, or 6 to his attack, and subtracts a like number from his defense. Should his differential be 5 or higher, he succeeds. Determine the direction the opponent's weapon



flies at random, and determine the distance in hexes be taking ½ the result of a die roll.

WEAPONS DIFFERENCES

The length of weaponry is often crucial on Barsoom. To reflect this, apply the following modifiers: Long sword, +3 against short sword, unless the wielder of the short sword is First Born. Long sword, +5 against dagger; short sword, +3 against dagger.

THOATS

Always rampage at a run!

SELECTIVE ATTACKS

Any player may attack any specific body part of the opponent at –3 attack factors. If a hit is scored, roll on the wound table normally, but substitute the body area rolled for the one attacked, applying a wound of equal severity. For example, if a light wound to the arm is rolled, but you were attacking the head, the wound becomes a light head wound.

WEAPONLESS COMBAT

Each player may roll an unarmed combat ability in the manner of his swordsmanship, using two dice for attack and defense. Against a similarly unarmed opponent, use the standard combat tables, reducing any damage by one level, i.e. a severe wound would be a moderate one. When fighting unarmed against an armed opponent, apply the following modifiers: Against a dagger, the dagger always strikes first. Everything else is as above. Against a sword, defense for the unarmed player is halved, the sword always strikes first.

I have also added the following to the adventure system.

PRINCESS POINTS FOR RANK

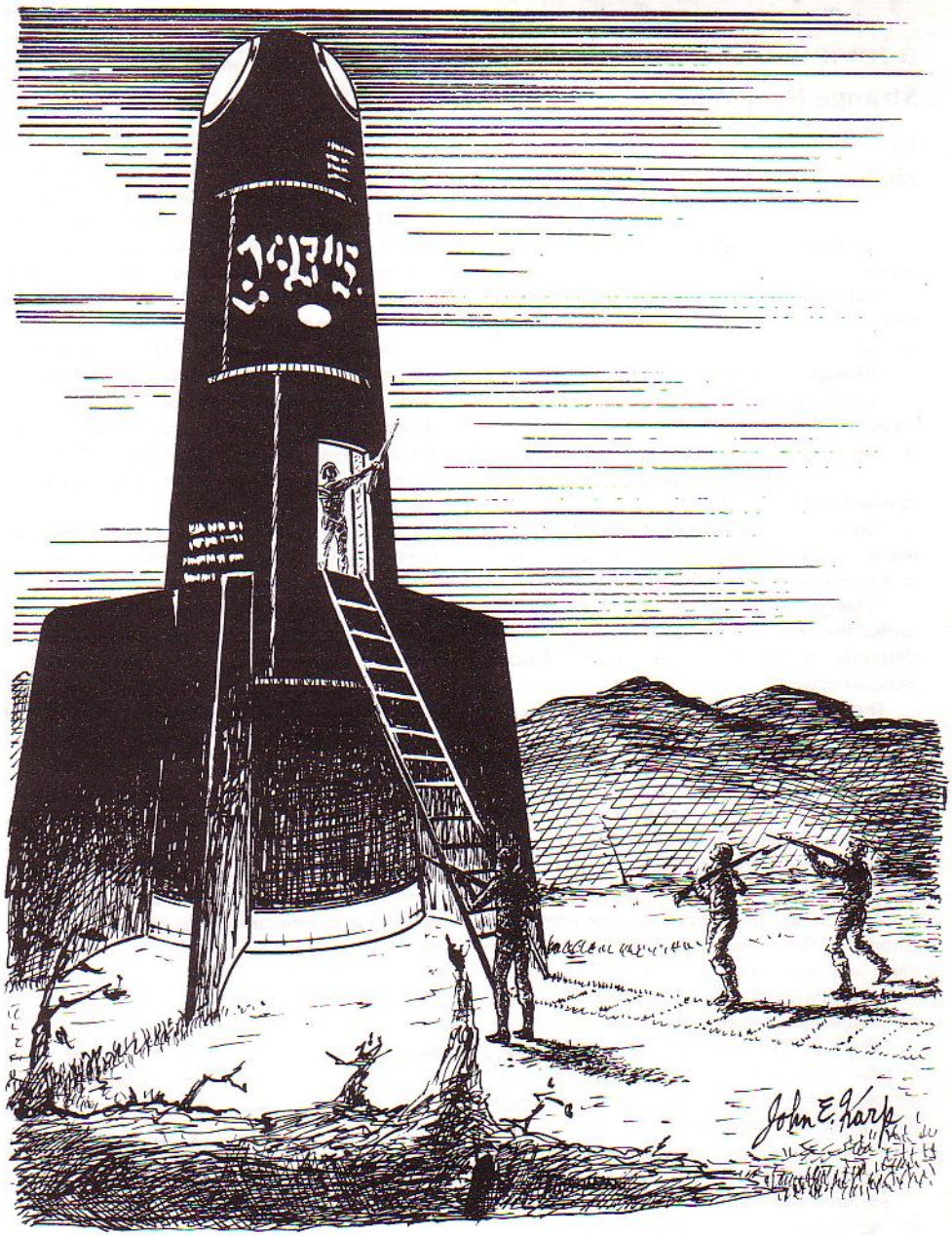
1. –100	6. +100
2. 0	7. +125
3. +20	7. +175
4. +50	9. +225
5. +75	10. +300

WOUND RECOVERY

Players may recover one wound point per day of rest, ½ point with continued activities. By using the miraculous healing salve of Barsoom, ½ the point lost are recovered over night, and two per day thereafter, without curtailing activity.

DIFFERENT PRINCESSES

Since some Princesses are more beautiful than others, the referee may give a specific modifier to a Princess in the form of negative Princess points. When rolling on the Princess response table, read the Princess point total of the suitor as though he had that many less. For example, a really striking Princess (–300) is courted by a Prince with a total 1250 Princess points. He must subtract her value (300) from his total to determine which response column he will roll on. In this case, his total, although 1250, is only as effective as 950! Referees note: Don't get too steep. I arbitrarily set the most beautiful of all, Dejah Thoris, at a –500 standard.



PRINCESS POINTS IN COMBAT

If, in the course of adventure, a player fights in the *presence of* a Princess from whom he has in the past received a "K" result on the response, the Princess points he acquires in that fight shall be doubled. If he has in the past received a "C" response from the Princess, he receives a 25 point bonus. If he has received both responses, he receives both bonuses.

COMBAT BONUSES

Limit potential gain vis a vis additional movement points to two extra hexes in all modes. Players may also trade 35 adventure points for a +1 to morale.

EQUILIBRIMOTORS

Equilibrimotors may be rented in most cities on Barsoom.

Ascend: 10' per phase. *Descend:* 10' per phase.

Emergency Ascent: Players may ascend at an increased rate, but for each phase, must roll on the "swoon" table. Roll one die and use that number times ten for the percentage. Ignore all Death results.

Emergency Descent: Similar to Ascent, except on landing must roll to trip at –6.

Acceleration: Equilibrimotors may accelerate one hex per phase. In the first phase of movement, the player may move one hex. In the second phase, two, in the third, three, etc. Each 10' of ascent counts as one hex moved.

Try these additions, and maybe Barsoom will become more real for you.

a review of
Strange New Worlds

by
Norman S. Howe

"Commander to all sections. Status reports, please."

"Sciences, here. Planetary orbit is stable, well within comfortable limits. Atmosphere normal."

"Biology. All lifeforms harmless."

"Colonization. Sir, this world won't be suitable for agriculture for several years. Frankly, I can't see. . . "

"Out of order, Colonization. We still need to hear from Engineering."

"Sorry, Captain. We've found an extensive deposit of Xynthium crystals. We can exploit it, but we'll need equipment."

"Thank you, Engineering. Gentles, that settles the matter. The Engineering Team and Colonists to the Transporter room. Prepare to beam down."

The captain sighed with relief. Luck appeared to be with the ship this month. The last year of travel had not been pleasant. First, there had been a Canthroscilla epidemic on Persius. The Colonists refused to debark without a Medical Officer, who could not be spared. Then, the ship had emerged from hyperspace over the Salgan homeworld, and faced a series of jumps past well-defended colonies. There was an enemy raid on Arminion, and one hyperjump had led to a Black Hole system with no outbound warpline. The communicator chimed.

"Message from home, sir. They've sprung for the Engineering equipment, but we can't get replacement teams until we collect some more produce. They said. . ."

"I know, Ensign. 'We're not doing this for the fun of it.' "

Momentarily the captain cursed the state of technology. A starship could set up a receiving gate for teleportation, but could not send anything back. Any produce was transported by starship, sometimes years in transit. Nevertheless, so long as it was aboard ship, it was as good as money; its mere presence set up a credit rating at the homeworld. Now they had exhausted their credit, and had to pick up more goods. Ah, well. . .

"Bridge, this is the commander. Any luck on our next destination?"

"Yes sir. As it happens, someone has used this gate and set up a beacon. We're headed for Kismal. That's the one with the Phonic Dragons."

"Oh, no!" the commander winced. "Tell the Astro Marines to stand by."

The situation outlined above represents a typical round of STRANGE NEW WORLDS, a Gametime Game from Heritage Models.

Players control starships which may travel through hyperspace from one world to another, or through normal space, slower but more certain. New worlds must be explored, their hazards neutralized, and colonies placed. The first player to control seven worlds, including his homeworld, wins the game.

The movement system of STRANGE NEW WORLDS is unique. Normal space travel is performed on a 16 x 16 square grid containing the 24 galaxies with habitable systems, as well as the 4 black hole galaxies. Ships may also use hyperjumps. On leaving a galaxy, a player turns up a counter placed in the appropriate Planetary System box on the map. The counter will bear the name of one of the galaxies on the map. Thereafter, this will be the destination of that planet's outbound hyperjump. Black Hole galaxies only have inbound jumps, forcing travel through normal space. There will always be four locations reachable only by normal travel.

Conditions on a uncolonized world are determined by a deck of Planetary System cards. To colonize a planet, a player must expend Crew Cards, purchased from a deck at 100 credits apiece, place one Colonist card on the planet box, and mark his possession with a control counter. As the Crew Cards are drawn at random, a player may find he lacks some of the requirements for colonization.

Each controlled world produces at least 50 credits a turn. When a starship is at such a system, the credits may be transferred to the homeworld. Additional crew cards may be bought at controlled worlds using homeworld credits. No more than 4 crew may be kept on a ship at one time, with any extras placed on the planet for later retrieval.

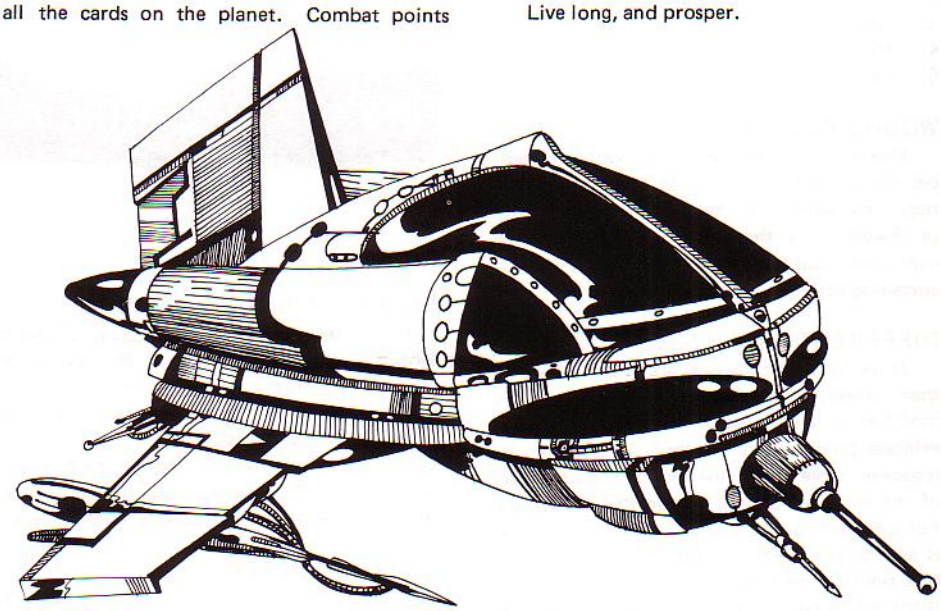
Ships and homeworlds are invulnerable. To take over an opponent's colony, a player must assign Crew Cards from his ship to attack the planet. The colonizing player defends using all the cards on the planet. Combat points are exchanged on a one-for-one basis, and the winner gains control of the planet. The attacker must have a colonist available to achieve this; if the defender has even a 1-point card left, he retains control (although a one-point unit, not being a Colonist, cannot collect revenue.).

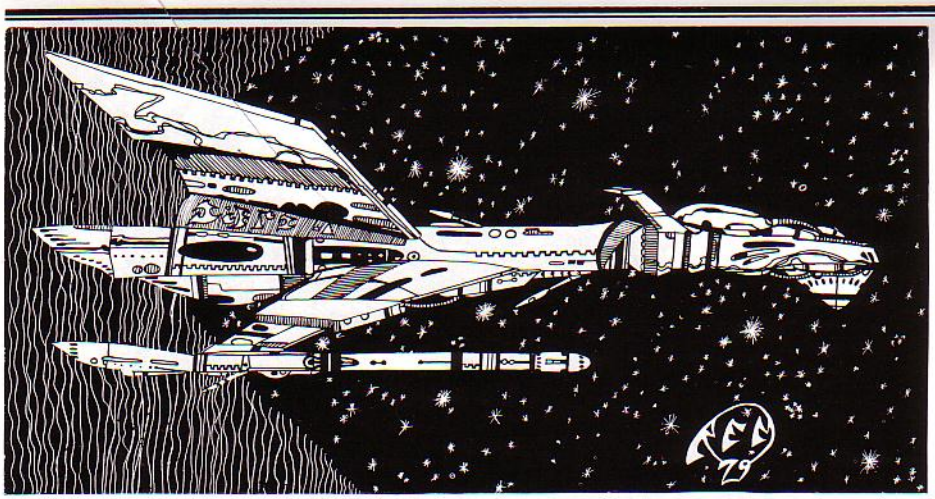
The physical components are of the high quality one expects of a Gametime Game. The counters and board are heavy and thick; the cards are flexible and durable. The game board represents each planetary system as a galaxy on a white and blue board. The worlds are alphabetically named from Arminion to Xela. The rules are clear and concise, with remarkably few errors. The cards contain excellent illustrations of the eight crew types and the conditions on 24 planets. The counters are mainly ½ inch squares, but the 6 spaceships, for up to six players, are one-inch circles. There are 106 galactic credit counters in denominations from 50 to 20,000.

Strategy in STRANGE NEW WORLDS is complex. A player must protect his colonies against other starships, but must retain a sufficient variety of crew cards to ensure colonization of a new world. The Security Teams are good for this, as they are not required for any type of colony. Whenever possible, hyperjumps should be used to find new planets, but normal space travel may often prove faster in the later parts of the game to get to specific locations. In a long, multiplayer game, a second victory condition comes into play: if no one has seven worlds when the last hyperspace jump is discovered, the player with the most *cash* wins.

STRANGE NEW WORLDS takes about 20 minutes per player to complete. It's a fascinating, exciting game with overtones of Star Trek and the best space operas. I have not seen a better game this year.

Live long, and prosper.





STARGATE

a review
by
Mark Watson

With the great success of Metagaming's MicroGames, it was inevitable that some manufacturer would mimic the idea. The manufacturer is Simulations Publications Inc., and they have done an excellent job of mimicking at that. STARGATE is one of four SPI mini-games called Space Capsules.

Upon first examination, STARGATE has a great resemblance to the MicroGames. The game consists of a rules pamphlet, a counter sheet, and a 17 x 11 game map which also serves as a game folder. At this point, however, the resemblance ends. The game counters are constructed of the heavier, pre-punched cardboard similar to the ones used in SPI's larger games. There are 100 of these counters, only 40 of which are actual units. Nevertheless, the pieces are brightly colored and of excellent quality. The mapboard is of heavy paper and contains two "stargates", a "null gate", and many numbered hexes indicating "energy fields". In addition to these components, there are two tables and charts sheets which makes for more convienent play.

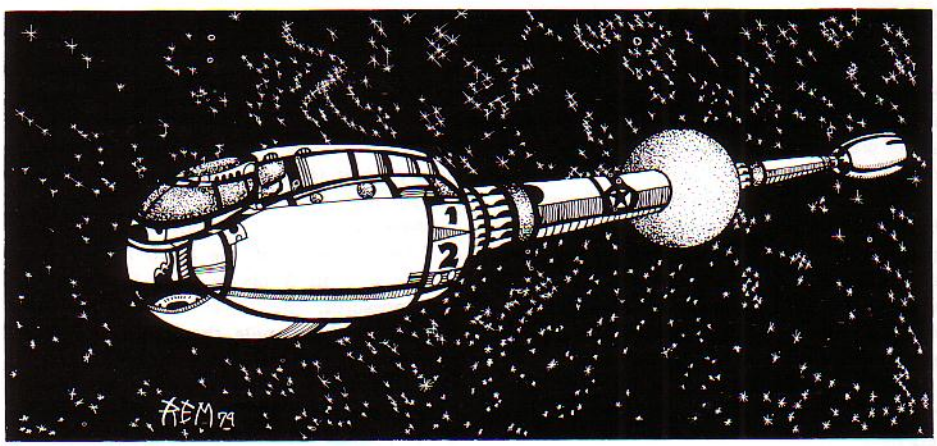
The rules of STARGATE follow the tradition quality of SPI, and, despite a few ambiguities, are clear and logically presented. The game itself deals with the established evil power, the Virunians, against the remenents of colonized space, the Humans, the Iguguis, the Meta-Mexish, and the Duoniops. The Virunian fleet consists of the powerful "tri-ships", and their counterparts, the "monads". The tri-ships, as the name implies, are three separate unit counters which act as one unit. There is a control unit, a weapons unit, and a transport unit. Although they may be grouped in many ways, a weapons or transport unit grouped without a control unit becomes a berserker. The remaining forces, including the monads and coalition forces, are your typical interstellar craft with capabilities of teleportation and wobble movement.

The STARGATE mapboard is three dimensional. Each linear row of hexes represents one dimension. Thus, ships which are in different rows are in different dimensions. This is what makes movement in STARGATE interesting. During its movement phase, a unit may select one of many options. First, a ship may travel in a single dimension by moving in a straight line. If a ship wishes to move to another dimension (i.e. another hex row) it may do so, but comes under enemy fire while it is changing dimensions. Another movement option is "gate skimming". In this process, a ship moves toward one of two stargates, which I assume is the equivalent of a black hole. Once it enters the gravitational field of the stargate, a ship may revolve around it, producing an end result of entering in one direction and exiting another. Some units are capable of teleportation. Simply stated, ships may move from one hex to another with unlimited range, but must do so in a straight path. A final mode of movement is wobbling. This is similar to teleportation, but the unit may move in any direction.

The Virunian units are placed randomly in the two stargates, and the game begins with ships zipping in and out of dimensions, zapping each other. Combat takes place in two modes. The first is approaching fire, and the other is conventional ship-to-ship-combat. When two ships move into adjacent hexes, they undergo the approach procedure. This process consists of the attacking and defending player choosing one of three maneuvers which are then cross-index to determine results. When two ships occupy the same hex, ship-to-ship combat is initiated. The results of this are then determined by a cross-index of a die roll and a combat strength differential. This process of moving, approaching, and attacking is carried on until six Virunian or eight Coalition units are destroyed.

The big question is: Is STARGATE as good as any Micro? Physically, STARGATE contains a better counter assortment, but Micros have a more elaborate rules booklet. STARGATE has two charts and tables sheets, but it also tends to be more expensive than Micros. In any case, the physical quality is pretty much balanced between the two. The Micros, however, tend to be a more interesting game. While STARGATE's unusual type of movement and ship composition make the game somewhat interesting, the game soon becomes tedious. What makes the game this way is its lack of depth. Once one becomes adjusted to the novel type of movement, the game becomes a simple matter of who can run faster and shoot quicker than who. This is not to say STARGATE is a total loss. With the addition of my own optional rules, I was able to make STARGATE much more interesting. With such twisted tactics as leaving a Virunian weapons unit by itself and getting the hell out of the way while it goes berserk on an enemy unit, STARGATE became a fairly interesting game. Indeed, STARGATE is definitely in a class by itself, certainly worth playing, and undoubtably worth its current price of $3.95.

STARGATE and the other three Space Capsules are available from Simulations Publications Inc., 257 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y., 10010.



Adding
Monsters vs Monsters to THE CREATURE THAT ATE SHEBOYGAN

by
Rich Moser

The Space Capsule game no.1, THE CREATURE THAT ATE SHEBOYGAN is quite good. Even though the creature has heavy OGRE overtones (one multi-powered thing vs. a variety of weak things), it has its own special quality making it fun. One of this game's problems is that the rules don't explain how to include more than one monster per game allowing simulation of actual monster battles or multi-player games (two or more monster players and one human player).

I deal with this problem by adding these changes to the various rules:

(4.0) – Here, all the monsters go in order, then finally the human player (if there is one).

(5.3) – Monsters may overrun, but may not end turn in another monster's box. Overrunning may be done only if the overrunning monster's attack strength is at least equal to the defending monster's defense strength. Results are rolled on the CRT and, if the result means only one of the monsters is to lose points, the losing monster may be retreated one box and may not move on his next turn. If a monster is retreated onto a building or bridge, the structure is reduced to rubble, no victory points are awarded.

(6.0) – Monster vs. Monster is treated like Monster vs. Unit.

(11.4) – If a fire is started in a box occupied by a monster, a die is rolled -- one or two, the monster must subtract an equal number of points. Otherwise, printed rules are followed.

(13.21) – If a monster of great height falls on a box with a monster in it, the monster in the box immediately takes off 6 points. Monsters of great height may grab a passing monster on a roll of 5 or 6.

(13.22) – Unless a monster has the power of web spinning, he may not pass over a webbed box. If any monster is in a space onto which webbs are created, the monster is trapped for two turns unless the monster has Great Height or Web Spinning Power, in which case the monster is trapped for only one turn.

(13.23) – A monster may immobilize another monster on a roll of one. If both monsters have this power, the power is negated for both creatures.

(13.24) – Blinding light affects monsters.

(13.25) – Monsters may jump over other monsters, but monsters may grab at other monsters in a similar way to helicopters. If the monster is grabbed, it falls in a manner similar to overrunning.

(13.26) – Radiation does not affect other monsters.

(13.27) – Mind control does not affect other monsters.

(13.28) – If a monster flies over another monster, the monster on the ground may try to grab the flying monster as if the monster was jumping over the other (see the modifications to rule 13.25). Flying monsters cannot fly into a box containing another flying monster.

(14.1) – The monster player receives a victory point for each point he makes another monster lose.

New Scenarios – "Monster X" scenario or "The Invasion of the Astro monsters" -- This is a 2 to 5 player game involving the Tyrannosaurus, the Giant Moth, the Jet-Propelled Flying Reptile, the 3-headed monster, and a human force of 70 Initial Strength Points. The 3-headed monster player may fire breathe 6 times per turn, and may, 3 times during the game, send down an 8 point attack strength laser beam anywhere on the map (sent by the aliens controlling the 3-headed monster). For a 2 player game, one player uses the 3-headed monster, the other player uses the other 3 monsters. For a 3-player game, use the above and the other player takes the human player role. A 4 player game includes all 4 monsters, each player taking one. In a 5 player game, each player is either one of the monsters or the human force. In all games, each player tries to stop and destroy the others. Once a monster reaches a Victory Point level of 65, the game is over and that monster wins.

"Godzilla vs. King Kong" – This scenario uses the Tyrannosaurus, the Giant ape, and a human force of 60 points. This is either a 2 player game, with one player using the humans and the giant ape to try and kill the Tyrannosaurus, who must get 90 Victory Points to win, or a 3 player game, 2 players getting a monster and one other player getting the human force. The Ape player and the Human player must first work together to get the Tyrannosaurus and then kill each other, the survivor winning. The Tyrannosaurus needs 80 Victory Points to win. With these new rules, many new and exciting scenarios can be created, and adding much versatility to this new SPI game.

Response

RESPONSE is an experimental article for The Space Gamer. We get a fair number of longer letters which raise interesting points. Rather than print the letter without note, RESPONSE will carry comments by someone at Metagaming. Since many questions raised by readers cover similar concerns, RESPONSE will, hopefully, supply answers for many.

Sirs:

Perhaps if you are interested in a one-thousandth opinion, I might proffer some of my thoughts.

I had been meaning to write to you for some time, but was not sure of the exact angle that I should take, with my attention fixed upon the feedback results, perhaps I have found that angle.

A general comment can be made here that 11% of the readers is an unrepresentative minority, so the games survey has little relevance. Also, from my own experience, many of those who responded would not have responded to everything. A trend of voting style and items to which were responded may have developed. Such would destroy the validity of the survey. More clearly, those who responded to item A may have scored everything highly, so a four or five could be equated as poor, while those who responded to item B marked all lowly, so a rating of six or seven could be considered excellent. It is possible that many may have responded to things which they *knew of*, but didn't *know*.

Throwing out all the factors in the above paragraph (we do have to work with what we have got), we can look for some general thoughts. Being a long-standing wargamer, one of the first things I noticed was SPI over AH. The fact that the GENERAL drags second low in magazine ratings is not surprising; I like the magazine, but I like wargames, I'd hate to think of looking through it for an SF/F article. Also, it could be noted that they have only one game to appeal to this audience, and that did not rate overly well. Still, this does not justify such a low rating to the company, a fine organization whose products could easily be considered the highest quality available. Not to detract from them, as my business with them has been limited, but I do think that SPI is guilty of over-producing, with far too many known-flops on the market; it is this raw quantity that usually scares me away from their games. SPI has more home runs; AH has the higher batting average.

Your observation is valid to me. Avalon Hill does do a better job, on average, than Simulations Publications Inc. TSG's readership overlaps Strategy & Tactics far more than The General. TSG is for the hard core gamer. Avalon Hill's customer base tends to be more general public. The hard core gamers like SPI's volume of titles and simulation approach. Avalon Hill buyers want to play the games for fun.

type	rating	highest rating	difference	average rating
FRP (fantasy role)	7.37	6.85 (D&D)	−.52	6.29
STL (space tactical)	6.92	6.89 (BFM)	−.03	5.84
PTC (planetary tactical)	6.84	6.69 (I:A)	−.15	6.00
FBG (fantasy board)	6.75	7.15 (TRT)	+.40	5.84
FSL (future society)	6.55	6.93 (Imp.)	+.38	6.18
SRP (space role)	6.18	7.08 (Tr.)	+.90	5.86
U (unclassified)	5.44	6.96 (CE)	+1.52	5.73

Another thing that caught my eye was a rather quirky relationship between the game type ratings and the ratings of the games of those types. (I might add here that I would pay little heed to the game type ratings, far too few people involved to establish any trends). Although the relationship was evident to me, I was not sure that I could put it in qualitative terms so that others could see it, so I studied it further and got some quantitative information, which is supplied in the table. Make note here that all Metagaming games were deleted from the lists to avoid warping values.

Although at first glance these figures may seem to be almost random, defying all patterns, it is possible to glean some facts from them.

FRP—highest in type and average rating, the reader's number one choice. The fact that D&D does not rate as highly shows that the players are looking for something more.

STL—Battlefleet Mars is a clear leader, but better yet is desired. On the average, these games do not meet the expectations of their buyers.

PTC—no clear signs, Invasion: America is not what is desired, but is better than other offerings. Most games are well received, but more is desired.

FBG—overall rating and average fit together well, evidentally TRT (The Ring Trilogy) is more than was expected from this field.

FSL—the games are well designed as a whole, it is simply that this is not the area where most are interested.

SRP—underrated, the games are thought more highly of than their field, Traveller being a clear leader.

U—the average of the games rated is higher than the rating of the field in this case alone, as could be predicted.

A completed project can be liked, but it is hard to like the idea of project that has no clear goal.

Put into terms you can use, there's a good market for FRP, STL, and PTC games, not because they're highly rated, but because players are unsatisfied with what has been offered so far. The FBG market is also open, but it would be hard to displace TRT. FSL and SRP markets are tight, sales would be tough. Unclassified is unclassfied, make a good game and it will sell, though not great successes will come from here.

The way the ratings are structured gives the results you've quantified. All *readers are asked to do the game type ratings.* Only *readers who've got or played a game are asked to rate a game. I think the game type ratings are the readers perception of fun. Fantasy Role Playing games are the most fun, and Space Role Playing the least fun, ignoring Unclassified. Yet, Traveller outrates D&D and the average rating for the types isn't too different.*

The reason for the high Traveller and Imperium ratings arises from the ratings of a very loyal group of Game Designer's Workshop fans. From studying the feedback forms, it was clear that GDW was favored by a group of fans who rated their products high and everything else relatively low. Loyal fans are a plus for GDW even if a fairly small group can skew the ratings. The same type of bias for Metagaming was apparant in last years ratings. This year TSG readers were more willing to rate Metagaming more fairly.

Hopefully, the affect of small, intensely loyal groups will decrease in future ratings. As circulation grows and more readers participate in the ratings bias will decrease. I'm not trying to deflate GDW's showing. Gamers should count loyalty a plus. A company doesn't get such loyalty without doing something very popular with some gamers.

The only clear thing I see from the ratings is a dilution effect. The more gamers rating a game, the less likely it is to get a good rating. Next year we'll go back to showing the percent response data.

D&D has to be the single most popular game in our industry this decade. I suspect more gamer hours are spent on D&D than all other simulation/conflict/adventure gaming put together. D&D is popular because it is a great concept, not because of excellent design in the first version. Yet, D&D gets mediocre ratings.

On TSG: the "slick" format is probably your best bet for increased circulation; it impresses newcomers without loosing old followers. ALL magazines published by a company with other interests are house-organs, to one extent or the other, but you can keep working on getting better. Oh, lest you get too comfortable, you definitely could use some work in the area. Apparently you didn't take the feedback in this area too seriously, it's probably the most pertinent information you took in. Metagaming could go under. Over-confidence and horn-tooting at this point has a greater chance of accomplishing this feat than anything else. On that, many of those who are so worried about your survival are probably thinking about their subscriptions, especially patron subscribers.

We take all feedback very seriously. TSG feedback is, unfortunately, speaking to a difficult problem. We depend on submissions,

mostly from gamers. We print the best we get. All we can hope is that more writers emerge and that those we have continue to improve, as they have.

As for tooting our own horn, I'm guilty. TSG has to do some publicity for the house. At least we've got good products to toot about. TSG straddles a dilemna of being a house organ, or a general SF&F gaming publication. We'd all starve as a general publication.

I don't like horn tooting, and feel we do little. When I see the hype some others give their products, I shudder. If we weren't visibly proud of our games, everyone would think something is wrong with them. 'Advertising America' conditions us to expect a hype, and worry if we don't get it.

On the artistic side, you need more good articles, longer ones that generate more interest, the new typesetting should help here. This goes triply for fiction, much of it is simplistic, none of it (save Eldon) is long enough to generate much interest. Art should only be done by artists. Humanoid figures, odd-shapes, strange monsters and non-symmetry may look like SF/F, but it often is a hide-out for lack of talent. Of course, some of the work has talent; look for attention to and reproduction of detail (i.e. two odd-shaped, non-symmetrical, detailed objects that are identical) and dynamic or moving work (though the latter may be hard to come by, especially at your rates). Doug Potter's illustrations and Littlejohn's cover are good, the rest I could do or better, myself. I don't count myself an artist, but I do draw some symbolic works (because my doodles look better than my poetry reads), and I am confident that without inspiration I could equal most of the "art" within your covers.

I think we do a better job on art than any other firm. Art is a matter of taste. You like what we have or not. Ben cons me into a small fortune for art. As cheap as I am, I wouldn't pay if it wasn't good and effective. Metagaming will continue to improve art.

TFT: problem, this game has definite character limits, IQ and DX are cut off at levels that can be reached by a starting character, usable ST isn't far behind. I sincerely hope that this is one of the things holding up ITL. I look for Melee and Wizard to lose popularity soon because of this, if ITL is so limited, it won't make it. Also, don't rush its production, those who loose interest in the wait will quickly revive when it comes out, especially with a few good reviews early; if it comes out quick and bad it is certain to cause quite a few to lose interest.

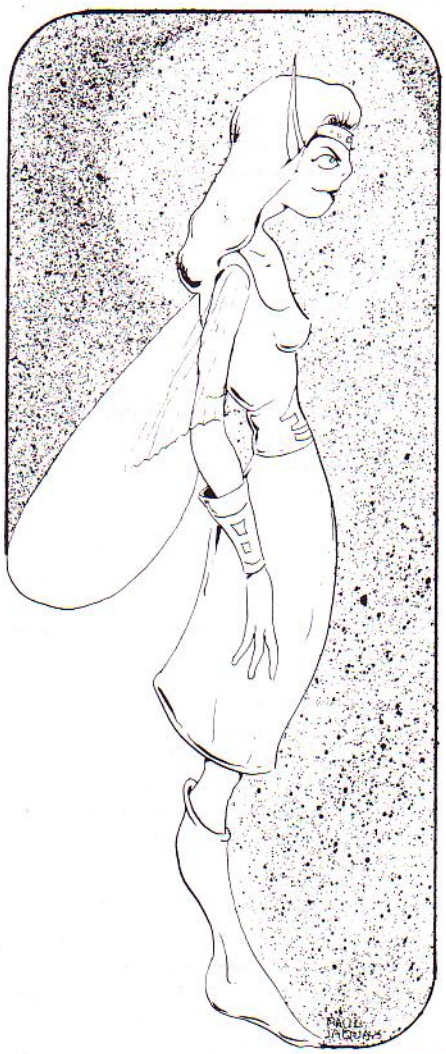
I promise TFT:In The Labyrinth won't dissapoint you. It is definitely not limited. It has. . . ., well, let me mute the toot. You decide when you see it.

Micros: bad. They *do* play themselves out, though you can get your money's worth from them (if I wasn't a hoarder, I might just throw them out when I got tired of them), the price is miniscule, I spend in three digit figures to support my habit, er, hobby. The problem is they have further faults.

All of them but Melee, Wizard, and Death Test are attempts at simulation, none of them succeed. As proof of this, let's take the old favorite, the one most would go to bat for, Ogre, and its spin-off, GEV. Simulated tank warfare? Hardly. I could discuss this at length, but will try to limit myself to just a few comments.

Leaving the overall situation (which I feel is unbelievable) out of it, we'll concentrate on the fighting. To represent tank duels lasting a few seconds, a time scale of two minutes per turn is used. To represent rapid-fire gunnery, units shoot at one target vehicle, or one system on a large vehicle. To represent new technology we have fully armored hovercraft that cut across terrain that is impassible to their modern-day, stripped predecessors at 66 mph. Infantry strolls along at 19 mph, enormously massive vehicles travel in a radiation and ECM ridden environment by the guidance of an unassisted computor, while tanks (heavy and light move at the same speed) can't make 40 on the roads.

You are knocking the Micros for a quality they never were meant to have, i.e. simulation accuracy. They are for fun with playability. If you want simulations, buy SPI games, If you want to play, buy Micros. Just ask yourself when you last "played out" a simulation. I don't feel bad at all when gamers tell me they've played OGRE 60 times or more and now see some limits. Name another game that gave you more fun!



The greatest insult is the move-then-fire rules. This permits an out-of-range attacker to move in and shoot while keeping an in-range defender from shooting and moving back. Mobile defense is impossible, only stand-still slugfest. Trying to retreat pulls you out of range. The combat therefore resembles the lumbering engagements of archaic foot troops, not sweeping dog-fights of swift armored vehicles.

The reason for the rules were to make the Ogre work, they should not have been used for GEV.

Other examples of non-simulation is the arbitrary unit values in Ice War, or the ridiculous astronomy behind Black Hole.

Generally, the games show lack of detail, lack of depth, failure to recognize key factors, and lack of imagination. Imagination in that there are no innovations of design, in fact, much of the rules are plagurization. Imagination as to game theme you have; lose it. The recent releases have themes so ludicrous that I would not even contemplate purchase, and Tartars and Martyrs was an insult to my dog's intelligence.

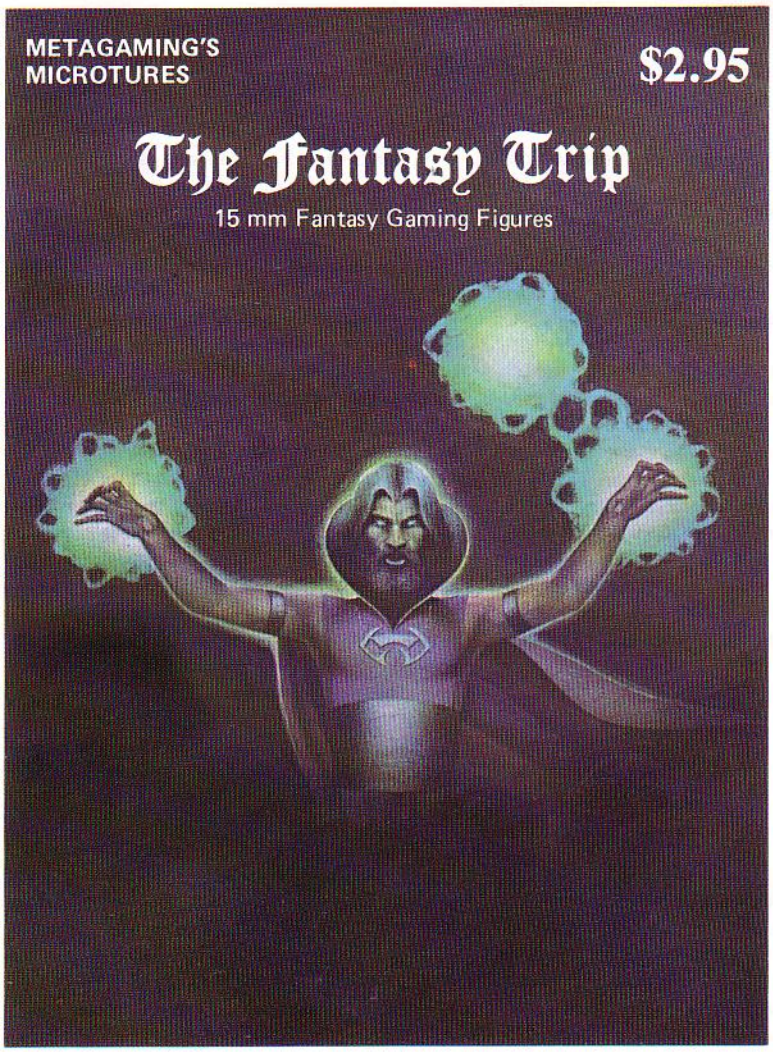
It seems, again, you're knocking Micros for something they aren't and never will be. They aren't huge, detailed, complex, accurate simulations. Buy War in the Pacific to fondle if that's what you want. Buy Micros to play for fun.

Metagaming will always give priority to playable fun. Basically, the novelty of Micros has worn off and gamers see them as they are: Cheap, playable, fun games without frills or complexity. They are as they were intended. Don't expect them to be $10 boxed games, except in fun value. What's happening now: gamers will have Micros for what they are, and other games for other reasons.

This letter has been overly long, and required much effort in the writing. If half as much effort is taken to consider to things here written, I am sure you will find yourselves enriched. A final word on Micros, I'm not saying they should be eliminated, just cut back drastically, worked out more carefully, and considerably less glorified.

We do listen and try. Every comment letter gets passed to me. I wish perfection were easy to attain. We live in a real world with real problems. It may be a real victory to just do a bit better each time.

Frank B. Weir, Jr.
Woolstock, Iowa



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Letters to the Editor

I recently noticed that in your GEV game game that some scenarios guarantee a victory for the defending player. For example, in the Breakthrough scenario, the defender places 4 howitzers, one each, at hex numbers 0510, 0809, 1509, and 1405. The infantry is used in protecting a 2-hex perimeter around the howitzers, using this set-up the defender can eliminate over 70% of the attacking force.

The same thing happens in the raid scenario; the most points the attacking player can acquire is 152. But, this takes over 17 game turns and by that time enough reinforcements would have arrived to inflict heavy losses. The Train scenario will be won by the defending player 70% of the time. Since all that is needed is the defense of the train, all the defending player has to do is use the howitzers to control key points on the terrain. (eg., hexes 1411, 1412, 1409, 1608, and the city in the upper left hand corner).

This does not mean the game is bad, the problem iteself is in the terrain and the range of the howitzers. For example, the only way into the northern edge of the map is through several key hexes, 0513, 1112, 1411, and 1608. Since GEV's are limited by terrain, they are sitting ducks for the powerful howitzers. Even though the GEV's have greater mobility and speed, the roads are held by infantry which have large defense strengths and are almost impossible to overrun. The only way to balance the game is to limit the howitzers range and have more clear territory.

Gregory Wong
Honolulu, HI

There's just something *about* that logo of yours.

When I look at it, I can't help mulling over what about it bothers me: the angles of the "A" and "M" clash just enough to be annoying; the letters are sometimes so obscured by parts of other letters that they come off awkward and confused; and the whole thing, with its precise angles, arcs and pseudo-technological slits, falls short of the mark.

Yet, beneath this superficial analysis, I always feel like I *should like* the logo, like maybe I'm missing something and the thing is really a work of art. I think this is because I've partially succumbed to the common belief that a professional magazine can do no wrong -- that none of its facets are subject to polishing by the lowly readers. However, I know that you're not a magazine that thinks this way and you don't expect your readers to, either. Personally, I'm anxious to see TSG hit the number one spot, and it disturbs me when I think you're wasting potential. TSG has undergone a load of drastic format changes. Now, you might want to consider changing your logo. I don't think it could hurt.

Another thing: I think you know it's a bad idea to drop your fiction. Right now, TSG is too small to run articles and reviews on enough games to satisfy the majority of its readers. I keep reading because you publish something on a game I like or want to hear about in about every other issue. In the mean time, your fiction gets me past articles like "STICKS AND STONES: A STATISTICAL THESIS ON CONVERTING HUMAN PHYSICAL ABILITIES INTO GAME SYMBOLISM." (This title never appeared in TSG, of course, but it is exemplary of the kind of articles I see from time to time and can't get half way through.) On the other hand, when TSG gets big enough to really do the industry justice (and the number of gamer submissions grows enough to allow it to do so) you'll have higher base pay rates for unsolicited manuscripts and will be getting fiction suitable for publication in almost any related magazine, at which time it will be a definite plus, rather than a necessity.

Eric Robinson
Boston, MA

TSG no. 22 arrived the other day and I think that you're beginning to get in the groove on producing an enjoyable magazine. I'm glad that I resubscribed to it. I'm also very glad that I started subscribing with issue no. 11 because it appears that the earlier issues are becoming collector's items.

I sympathize with you on the occurrences of Black Passover. I had a similar thing happen to me when I sold a service program to a local industry and then discovered I could not deliver what I had sold because my test supplier had very kindly discontinued a key item and had neglected to tell me about it. I'm sure, however, that the monetary loss to you is greater than the monetary loss was to me. When I told the boys in Springfield what had happened there were great exclamations of sympathy for you. They were also pleased to hear that you won't have any insurmountable financial difficulties as the result of production problems. They were also very pleased to hear about the projected price of TFT:ITL.

Tony Watson's article on ICE WAR was very good. This is the first time that someone has done a cost-effectiveness analysis of a game and I agree with him that ICE WAR has a lot of subtleties to it that are not generally seen by the average player.

The article on BLACK HOLE (forgive me but the name of that game sounds horribly obscene) was also very good. We have made one modification of the game in this area. We have mandated that a unit on the outside of the torus is never turned face up unless it is adjacent to an enemy unit. This means that, while one can fire missiles at an enemy unit on the outside, one is never certain of the unit identity of the target. It seems to make for a more balanced game.

I found the 1978 feedback results fascinating. One of the problems in using a Lickert-type rating scale is that your responses always tend toward the middle value of the scale. Thus, on a scale of 0-9, we would anticipate the average value of a response to be 5.00. It's hard to tell whether an average response is significant or not and it depends a lot on the size of the sample. I really disagree with your own opinion of your game THE YTHRI. That was one of the first games I purchased from Metagaming and I was quite pleased with it. I seem to remember that I got it for a ridiculously low price but I felt my money was well spent. Of course, it required the creation of player aids and I can't see why it can't be reworked a little bit to improve it's popularity. It, at least, was based on a situation which made sense. This cannot be said to be true of some of the other science fiction games I have played.

Surprise! I liked the story. I think the reason I liked it was that it had some very good ideas for TFT gaming. I will, therefore, rescind my statement about how I hate fiction in TSG for this one issue.

Your reviews were very good. Your reviewers are getting more objective in their evaluations of games. I have played Mercenary and find that it dovetails very well with the Traveller system. If you combine it with a tactical board game it becomes even more playable. The reviews of Spellmaker and Quest were enough to make one go out and buy the games. As far as I'm concerned, this is the function of a game review: one should be able to decide on the basis of the review whether one is interested in purchasing the game or not.

In general, TSG no. 22 is one of the best issues I've seen in a long, long time. You've overcome a lot of the layout problems, typographical errors, and article selection problems. The front cover even looked good. If you keep this up I'll be like King Gama in Princess Ida: I won't have anything to grumble at.

Oh, by the way, I had a chance to play HOLY WAR last night. It may be the best MicroGame yet. Once my opponent and I stop fumbling with the rules, I can see that it will become a very fairly little strategic game. What's more, it's making us anxious to get a copy of GODSFIRE to see how the level system works out in a macrogaming situation.

Mark Schulzinger
Springfield, MO

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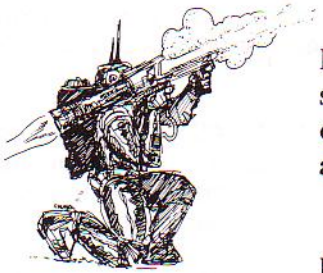

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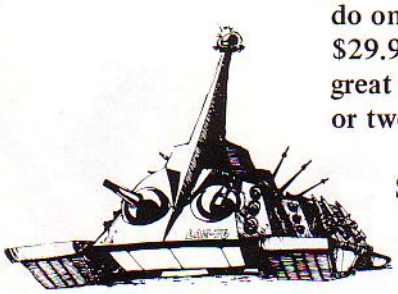

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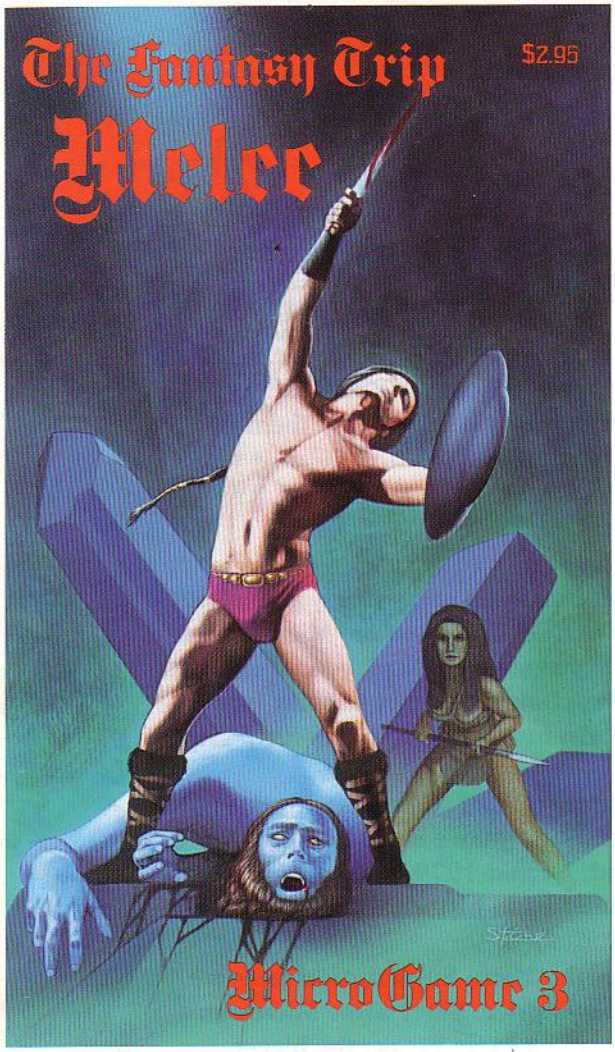


COMES A HERO. . . . .

The hero brave dominates fantasy--whether he's the muscle-bound barbarian brandishing the two-handed sword or using the cunning speed of rapier; he's a fighter through and through. This is the fantasy role-playing game where you create, and fight your own hero.

MELEE is a game of man-to-man combat with archaic weapons. Each counter represents a single warrior, with his own individually determined strength and dexterity. Players choose weapons and tactics for their fighters, and send them into combat against men, beasts, or monsters. . to victory or death.

MELEE is part of THE FANTASY TRIP. Metagaming's new fantasy role-playing system. It can be used as a combat system for any other fantasy game or you can play out individual combats for their own sake.

MELEE takes sword-play out of the books and onto the gameboard. Pick your shield, don your armor and heft a weapon from the rack. The MELEE is about to begin. . .

Components include:
*24 page rules book
*8¼" x 14" arena map
*68 play counters

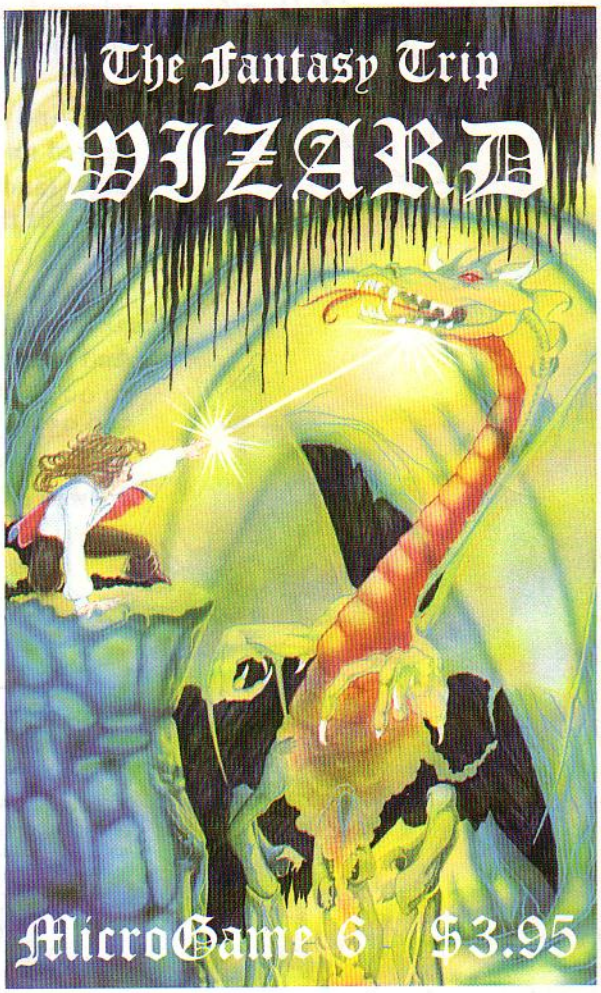
NONE DARE A WIZARD. . . . .

With fiery eyes, a shadowy figure raises his staff and points. To stand in his way is to risk the horror of his spells. Now you can be a wizardly master of magic. You create your own character, the Wizard, in this fantasy role playing game. You select his strength needed to power spells, his dexterity for speed and accuracy, and his I.Q. to master spells. Then, you put him in magical struggle against other masters of the black arts.

WIZARD is the magical combat system from Metagaming's THE FANTASY TRIP game system. These rules are completely compatible with THE FANTASY TRIP: MELEE rules. Both sets of rules may be used together in an expanded game.

WIZARD tests your skills and imagination. Create illusory beings. Throw lightning bolts. Call up monsters and fighters. Create fire, turn missiles, or fly. A full range of enchantments are possible. As a Wizards gains experience, he can add ever more to his list of mastered spells. Until, in time, he becomes a mage without peer, feared by all.

Components include:
*24 page rules booklet
*12" x 14" play board
*Two counter sheets of monsters and men



MELEE and WIZARD are available at your local hobby, toy, or book stores--ask for them. MELEE is $2.95 and WIZARD is $3.95 when ordered directly from Metagaming. Subscribers to THE SPACE GAMER pay $2.50 for MELEE and $3.50 for WIZARD. Each order requires a 50-cent postage charge.

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